

the pits

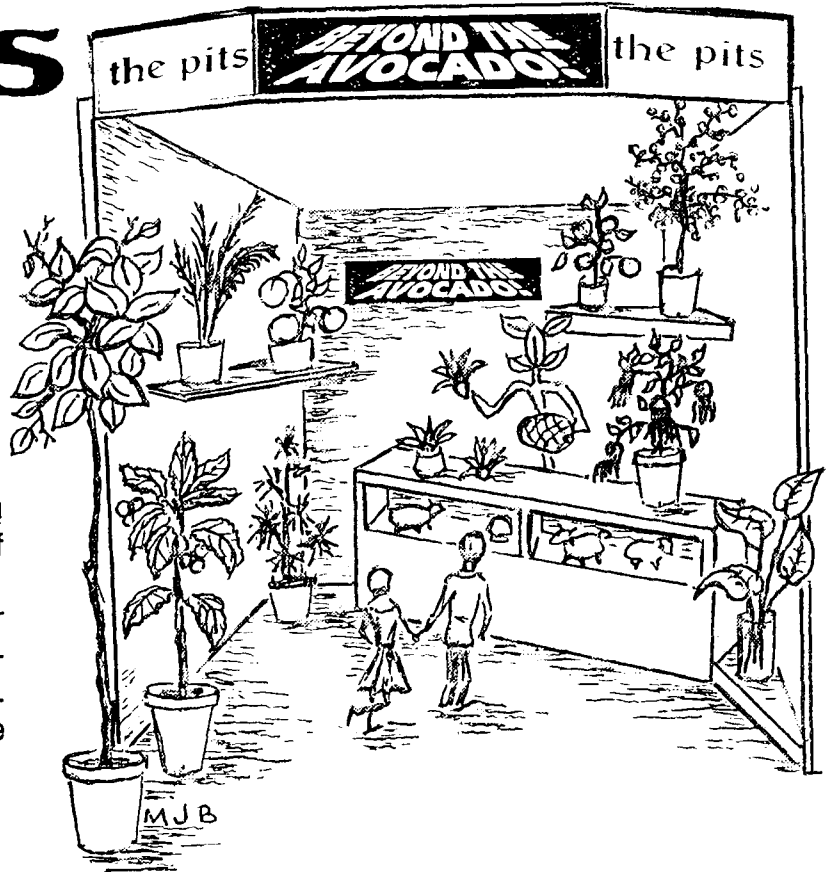
WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Cape gooseberry, carambola, carob, cherimoya, cippolini, date, guava, horned melon, kumquat, lemon grass, macadamia, mango, papaya, passion fruit, persimmon, prickly pear (pads & fruit), tamarillo, tamarind and water chestnuts.

SEEDS

This month Bob is offering, African dates and Spanish cherimoya courtesy of Trish Ortega, tamarind, and guava seeds.

If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council.



OH THOSE BLOOMING PLANTS!!

Our booth at the 1993 New York Flower Show searched the past and moved into the future... "Beyond the Avocado". Thanks to the design of Chris Carrdus, the back breaking construction labor, the schleping, and the plants of members, we won a silver medal. Doug Hawley did an incredible job organizing the 82 hours of booth sitting required for the show.

The open booth design, invited people into our booth to view the unusual plants, ask questions and read the computer designed signs. The latter gave colorful and brief histories of the plants.

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

Lemon

Citrus limon

"I was born as an orange but after an operation at age 3 (gem grafting), I became a lemon. I stay outdoors 'til the first frost or gales, then stay indoors in a cool room. Give me light and good food but not too much to drink."

I am 4 years old

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

Lemon

Citrus limon

"I am only 18 months old and I don't talk to strangers. That other lemon tree over there is my mother - you can ask her about me."



The Rare Pit & Plant Council

Buddha's Fingers

Citrus medica var. Sarcodactylis

"I was born here in New York from a cutting. I live out in the yard from May to Dec, then come indoors to a cool (40-50F) room for the winter in front of a big window with a fan for a breeze. I eat and drink little in winter, lots in summer."

I am 5 years old

Our show was stolen by Tony Carella's citrus and citron plants in flower and fruit. The show stopper to end all show stoppers was Tony's Buddha's Fingers. Everyone stopped and stared at the unusual, twisted hand-like fruits. We have had so many inquiries about this fruit; we have decided to reprint a previously published article of Tony's. Marty became fascinated with the fruit and has added some comments of his own.

CITRON

Citrus medica

Citron has an ancient and fascinating history. It has been revered in the mythology, religion, and medicine of many of the major civilizations of the world. It is conceivable that the allegoric biblical apple that Eve fed to Adam, was *C. medica*, having lost its true identity in the process of various translations.

In Greek mythology, the Golden Apples that Hercules had to recover from the Hesperides garden, speculatively, were citrons. They were the gift of "Ge" (earth, the mother of everything) to Hera at her wedding to Zeus.

From mythology to reality, we have good indications that 6,000 years ago there were citrons in the Hanging Garden of Babylonia. Also we know that at about the same period the Chinese were using citrons for medicinal and aromatic purposes. Both the Egyptians and the Jews revered and used citron in their religious ceremonies, a tradition still observed today in Judaism. In Italy, the citron fruits were known by the Romans as early as a few centuries before Christ. Paintings of citrons have been found in the excavations of Pompeii. The philosopher, M.T. Cicero (110-47 BC) mentions a fruit by the name of Citron, while the poet T. Lucretius (96-95 BC) mentions Citrus. It was Pliny the Elder, a Roman scholar, (23-79 AD) who first described a fruit by the name of citrus or citreus, that could have been a lemon or a Citron. He also, described the orange calling it Malum medicum, using the word "Medicum" only to indicate the provenance of the fruit from Mede, a region in the Middle East. Later the orange was also known as Malum aureum.

In 1753 the botanist C. V. Linnaeus (1707-1778), following the work of A. Cesaipino (1519-1603), finalized the binomial system in Taxonomy and named the citron: Citrus medica.

Half a century before Linnaeus made his mark in history, an Italian entrepreneur, B. M. Farina, born in Domodossola, Italy 1685, moved to Cologne, Germany. There he built up a fortune. During the Seven Year War, he sold French soldiers a fragrant water he called "Kolnisches Wasser". The soldiers brought the novelty home, and from there it became known all over the world as "Eau de Cologne."

The secret recipe called for: Extracts of Bergamot and Bitter Orange, extracts of Lavender and Rosemary, plus Oil of Lemon and Oil of Citron. The latter oil is less volatile and would impart a longer persistence to the lightness and freshness of the complex fragrance.

The lore of Citron has always included medicinal properties. In 1930 a bioflavonoid compound was isolated from the peel. It was named Vitamin P. and alleged to have therapeutic effects in the treatment of abnormal capillary fragility. Subsequently one of the components of the compound, Hesperidin, was believed to be the active factor and used in the treatment of some degenerative vascular diseases characterized by capillary bleeding. Today Hesperidin is listed in the U. S. and foreign Pharmacopeias as a sole agent or in combination with a large number of vitamin preparations. Notwithstanding the voluminous medical literature on the subject, the effectiveness of Hesperidin is not scientifically conclusive.

Citron is a rare and precious fruit that is difficult to find even in the most expensive specialty stores. It is treasured by connoisseurs for the refined fragrance its candied rind gives to cakes and pastries. Unfortunately, the citron that we find in most common pastries is not *C. medica*, but a cheap imitation sold under the name Citron which is actually the White, or Wax Gourd (*Benihcasa hispida*) to which synthetic fragrance and artificial



coloring have been added.

Italy is the largest producer of citron. The culture expanded in various regions of Italy, principally in Calabria and Corsica, but also in the Riviera and random other places. This distribution gave rise to a number of varieties with different characteristics. The Botanist Risso classified 17 varieties in the last century. Today most of them have disappeared and we are left officially with only three: The citrus media, *C. medica* var. ethrog, and *C. medica* var. sarcodactylis.

Citrus medica is a small tree with shrubby branching. The leaves are similar to those of the lemon, but are larger, wingless and have a short petiole. Stout spines cover the branches. The fragrant flowers are borne singly or in racemes on the older branches. The trees bloom most heavily in the spring and sporadically throughout the year. Male flowers are more abundant than hermaphrodites.

The fruits are large, 1-2 lbs. (exceptionally reported to over 10 lbs.), they are shaped like lemons and have a warty or bumpy appearance. They reach maturity in 8 months and have a golden yellow color. They have a very thick mesocarp, representing 90 % of the weight, with a very small amount of pulp which is very acidic and not easily edible.

The ethrog var. is similar to the above except for a smaller fruit, around 1 lbs. and a much smoother appearance.

["Fingered citron" ... The fruit of var. *sarcodactyles* (from the Greek 'fleshy fingers') has pronounced ribs and five or more apical extensions, a few inches long, resembling fingers. This variety is called Buddha's fingers and is appreciated in China and Japan for its penetrating fragrance, and is used to perfume rooms and clothing. The medium sized, 5-7 inch yellow fruit, has a very thick mesocarp that is all but impossible to peel. The bitter flesh (pulp) contains many seeds, and is of little value.

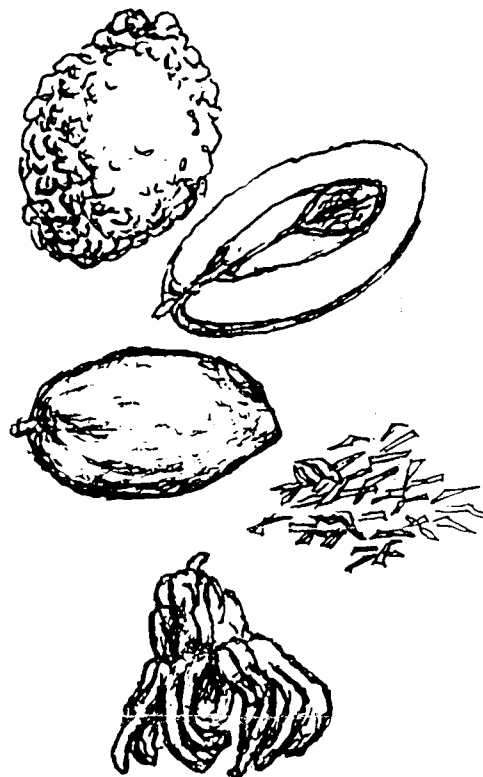
The plant is very ornamental and makes an excellent pot subject. It is, however, very are very frost sensitive and can only be grown in the warmer regions of California, Florida and the desert regions of Arizona.

Buddha's fingers has been cultivated for centuries; Flemish painters used this curiosity not as a grotesque of their imagination but as an actual still life subject. It is also found in the archives of 17th century botanical drawings. MJB]

The indoor cultivation of *C. medica* is a very demanding proposition. It has very particular climatic requirements. Anything below 50 F or above 70 F, or even sudden changes in the same range, will cause some damage. Optimal humidity rests in a narrow range. It requires gentle ventilation, but even moderate winds will cause problems.

I was supposed to write about my personal experience with my 5 year old *Sarcodactylis*. But really there was not much to say, except plant a seed, or a cutting and try your best. It is much more fun, and you may wind up having some beautiful and rare fruits with which you won't know what to do. Good Luck!

Antonio Carella



TARRAGON MUSTARD

The Pits know how to live. During the arduous, back breaking process of setting up our booth for the NY Flower Show, we always but on a royal spread for our workers. The most popular item is not a cookie, a cold cut, a loaf bread or a glass of wine... it is DSP's tarragon mustard. Marion Brown is so fond of this spread, she uses it for jam on her morning toast.

The recipe is from the cookbook of the New York Chapter of the American Herb Society (a small, but fantastic volume).

4 oz of dry mustard (Colemans)	5 eggs
1 cup of tarragon vinegar	3/4 cup of sugar
1/4 pound of butter (1 stick)	1 tsp salt

About 5-10 sprigs of fresh tarragon. (These are available in better supermarkets and gourmet shops)

Put mustard in a mixing bowl. Pour vinegar over it, but do not mix. Cover and let stand overnight or at least 3 hours. Put the mustard mixture in top of double boiler - preferably not aluminum - and beat with a whisk.

Add eggs one at a time, whisking in thoroughly. Add sugar, butter and salt. Continue to cook over hot water, whisking all the time until the mixture becomes quite thick. (About 15 minutes) Do not over cook or eggs will curdle. Put in jars with a sprig of tarragon in the bottom and one on the top and refrigerate. It will keep for many months.

SOWING & GROWING THE SEEDS OF THE MONTH:**Date (*Phoenix dactylifera*)**

Another show stopper was Tony's 4 year old date palm. It stands about 2 feet tall and has lovely deeply dissected foliage. Dates are a breeze to grow !

1. Sow them in any sterile potting mix buried 2 1/2 x the height of the seed.
They can be slow to germinate, 3-6 weeks, but sooner or later you will see a single reed-like frond push up through the soil. Since they are a bit slow, we sow the seeds in the pots of the larger plants and forget about them until we see the first frond.
2. Transplant the seedling when it is about 4 in tall. The first year there will be two fronds, the next 4, the next 8.... As the palm gets older, it develops a bulbous base from which the fronds emerge.

Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*)

1. Soak the hard brown seeds in water until they begin to swell and the skin begins to shrivel. (About 2-6 hours) If left too long in the water, the seeds will rot.
2. Sow them up in any kind of a container filled with a moist sterile potting medium. Sold in supermarkets, nurseries and 5 & 10s.
3. The seeds will germinate within a week. The young seedlings are adorable! A solid green disk (cotyledon) emerges atop a stout 2-4" green stem. Soon a little halo or wreath of minute leaves forms around the disk. They look like strange little green men from outer space. The seedlings stay like this for weeks.
4. When the disk falls off, the first fernlike true leaves appear. At this time, move them to individual 2-3 inch pots.

Cherimoya (*Annona cherimola*)

1. These seeds should be soaked overnight before planting.
2. Follow the instructions for the tamarind.
3. The foliage resembles an apple tree and smells a bit like boxwood.

FEIJOA SELLOWIANA

Pineapple guava
Height: 15 ft Zone: 8



Seldom have the common names of a plant caused as much confusion and consternation as that of the Feijoa; pineapple guava, guavasteen, fig guava, and worst of all, New Zealand fig.

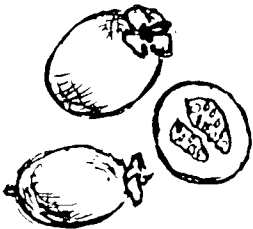
1. It is not a guava - *Psidium* spp. However, there is a strawberry guava (*Psidium cattelianum*) that could easily be confused with pineapple guava.

2. "Guavasteen" implies some sort of a cross between the mystical, and in this country, forbidden fruit of the mangosteen and a guava. Again nothing could be farther from the truth.

3. "New Zealand fig" is a real misnomer; It is not from New Zealand and it is not related to figs.

The feijoa (for want of a better name) is a medium sized, evergreen shrub from Brazil. It is the Myrtle family along with bayberries, Surinam cherries, jabotocaba and yes, the guavas. It is a gorgeous multistemmed shrub that can be used as a windbreak, clipped as a hedge or grown in a pot. The ovate, 3 inch, leathery leaves are dark green above and silver beneath. The foliage almost sparkles in the wind. And if you are so inclined; the leaves are edible and said to make tasty additions to a salad.

In the late spring, the bushes are covered with 1 inch white flowers. The stamens are scarlet and very showy. They are amongst the most beautiful and intricate flowers in "Pitdome".



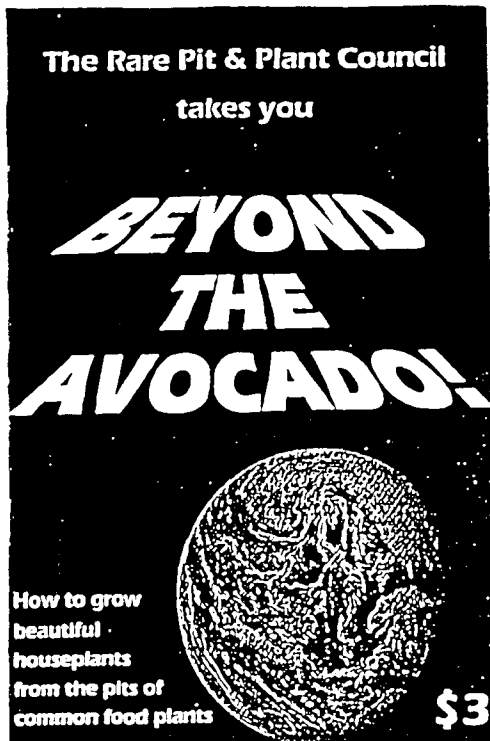
The fruits are 3 inches long, slightly swollen at the tip with a pronounced calyx, leathery and a dull blue-green color. The fruits do not change color as they mature and it is difficult to tell if they are ripe. One book suggests, shaking the bush and picking up those that fall to the ground. (Not too possible in the supermarket) If they yield to a firm touch - much as a peach, they are probably ripe.

The flesh is creamy and has the consistency of an underripe banana. The flavor has a pleasant tang; similar to a cross between a pineapple and a banana. When added to a fruit compote- the dish takes on a new dimension. Within the core of the flesh, there are about 20 small seeds. These can be sown at any time of the year and will germinate readily.

Feijoas are slow growing shrubs. Do not be tempted to spur them on with excessive fertilizers.

Commercially, they are grown in California. The plants tend to wither away if the temperatures exceed 80°; making them poor candidates for the Southeast and Gulf Coast. They are hardy to 15° and require a brief cooling period to produce fruit. (200 hours at temperatures between 30-42°). In the north, if the plants are kept at 45 - 55° they will become dormant. Put them outdoors after all danger of frost, and the plants will break dormancy and bloom. Seed grown shrubs will bloom and fruit in 4-6 years; grafted shrubs will bloom and fruit within 2-3 years.

Feijoas are wonderful subjects of the Pits. They adapt easily to pot culture, are relatively pest free, can be clipped to any size and shape; AND they bloom and fruit in pots!!



THE PICK OF THE PITS

has been
REVISED!!

Ten new pits and all new detailed plant illustrations have been added. There are special lists: Pits for Bonsai, Pits to avoid, Pits that bear crops, pests of Pits, hydroponic Pits, and aquatic Pits. Plus growing techniques, and caring for Pits !!!!

Chris Carrdus has done a stunning layout and clarified, and condensed the text. Marty has illustrated the text with fine line drawings of the fruit and the individual plants. Debbie has added 10 new pits to the text. We shouldn't toot our own horn, but it really is a glorious looking beast and full of all sorts of information! (alas, we do have to charge .50 postage which increases the total cost to \$3.50)

RECIPE

Sausage soup

This recipe is modified from one in a winter 1993 issue of Gourmet. It is extremely easy and tasty and can be varied to suit the cook.

Ingredients: 1/2 tsp Caraway and Cumin seed each.

1 leek

3/4 lb Kielbasa or other sausage chopped into bite sized pieces.

4 cups low salt chicken broth

1 lb boiling potatoes such as Aztec Gold, fingerlings or red new potatoes, peeled and chopped in a coarse dice.

4 leaves tart green such as spinach, kale or chard, cut into thin strips.

2 tbsp sweet butter.

Instructions: Heat seeds in a steel or enamel pan until aromatic, about 3 minutes. (If you have fancy french tinned copperwear do not use it as the tin will melt). Set aside.

Chop and saute till limp the white portion of the leek.

Add chicken broth and sausage and cook 5 minutes.

Add potato and cook till done.

Add seeds and greens and serve.

Comment: Be sure to use soft buttery potatoes. Don't salt till you taste because the sausage contributes enough for most tastes.

John Hart

DO THEY CALL IT "ARROWHEAD" BECAUSE IT GROWS SO FAST?

On a nasty January day, Madam Editor handed me three disreputable-looking brown things. "These are Arrowhead, *Sagittaria Sagittifolia*" she said; "Try growing them, and write it up for the newsletter."

From a previous issue, I found out that Arrowhead is a starch Chinese vegetable growing in a mud of 3 parts soil to 1 of gravel plus plenty of activated charcoal (Pet shops sell it for fish tank filters) without which the water gets foul.

So I mixed some of this mud, then found out the hard way something not spelt out in the newsletter; Arrowhead "corms" are very buoyant. They have to be held down by stones. Soon my three corms were buried under mud, stones, and a foot of water in an old aquarium. And they grew at amazing speed.

In 10 days, the first green shoot was poking above water level. In 20 days, the first leaf unfolded into an arrow-head shaped six inches long. About this time, Phred, the Siamese Phighting Phish came to swim among the burgeoning stems. When the arrowhead came back from the Flower Show, it topped 3 feet, and it will soon have to be re-potted (re-aquariumed?) if Phred is not to develop acute claustrophobia.

I'd urge you to try arrowhead yourself - but you'll have to wait until Nov-Dec when the fresh corms are in Chinatowns. Aquatic pits are more fun than I thought, and water chestnuts are next on my list.

Chris Carrdus

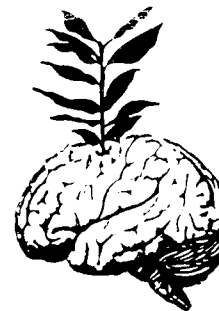


Are You **With Your Pits?**

Has your obsession with pit plants reached critical mass? Or certifiability?

Give yourself 5 points for each statement you agree with, 0 points when you disagree.

- 1) On tropical vacations, you hit the fruit stands before the beach
- 2) *Dirt* is a dirty word. You call it *soil*.
- 3) The death of a plant means the opportunity to replace it with a better one
- 4) You feel guilty throwing away a pit even if you have six of the same thing growing already.
- 5) Coming home, you turn on the plants' lights before the TV
- 6) You'd turn down a rent-controlled apartment if it didn't have nice big, sunny windowsills
- 7) The nice thing about December 22 is that the days are getting longer
- 8) When you and your plants are thirsty, *they* get a drink first
- 9) You buy fish to swim round the roots of your aquatic plants, instead of plants for your aquarium
- 10) You have more than five species or cultivars of any one genus, *and* you want a whole lot more
- 11) Before Thanksgiving, you're wondering if the seed catalogs are in the mail.
- 12) When it rains, you feel superior to those poor outdoor gardeners
- 13) Eating guacamole in a Mexican restaurant, you wonder what happened to all those pits
- 14) You have this urge to water and nurture all those wilted plants in the produce section of the super-market
- 15) In friends' holiday pictures you ignore the people and look at the vegetation
- 16) To you, a weed is just a plant anyone can grow
- 17) You have slips of the tongue like "please pass the soil" for "please pass the salt."
- 18) You're a whiz at multiplication and division
- 19) Your hands twitch uncontrollably when you're in the tropical greenhouses at the Botanic Gardens
- 20) If your cat chews up a favorite plant, you think seriously of violin strings

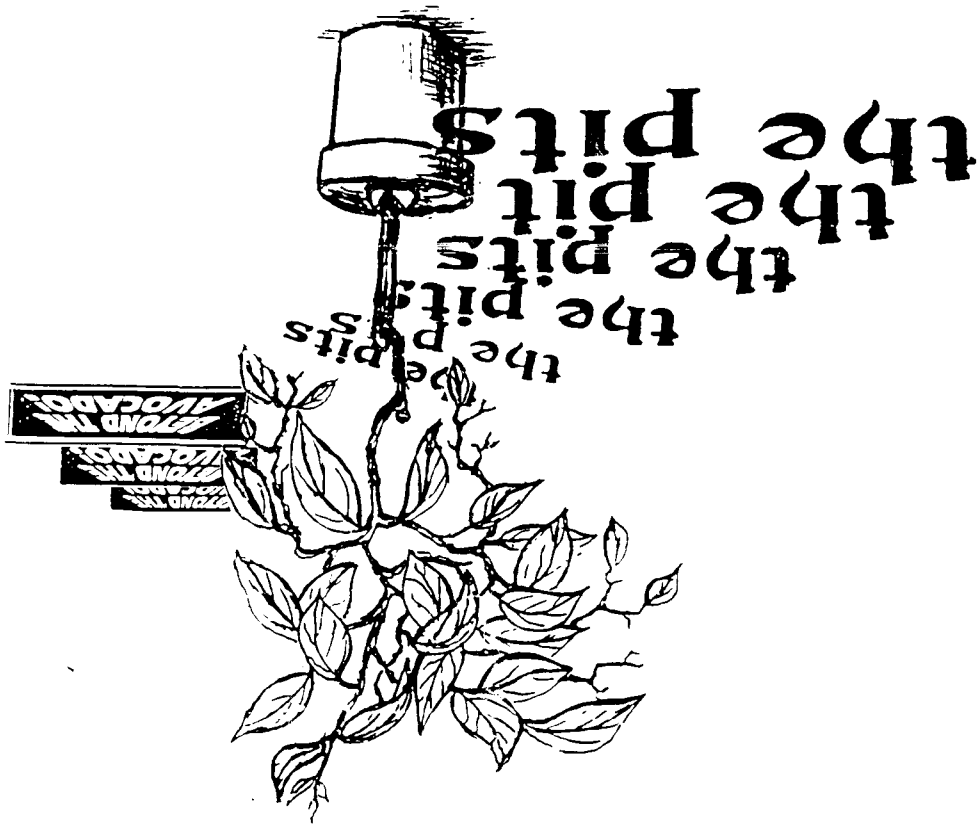


0-20 Why is a relatively sane person like you taking this test?

25-45 You're not obsessed; you're just - um - single-minded.

50-70 Seek professional treatment without delay

75+ A completely pit-iful case.



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