

the pits

NEWSLETTER

Aug/Sept 1995
Volume 18 # 9

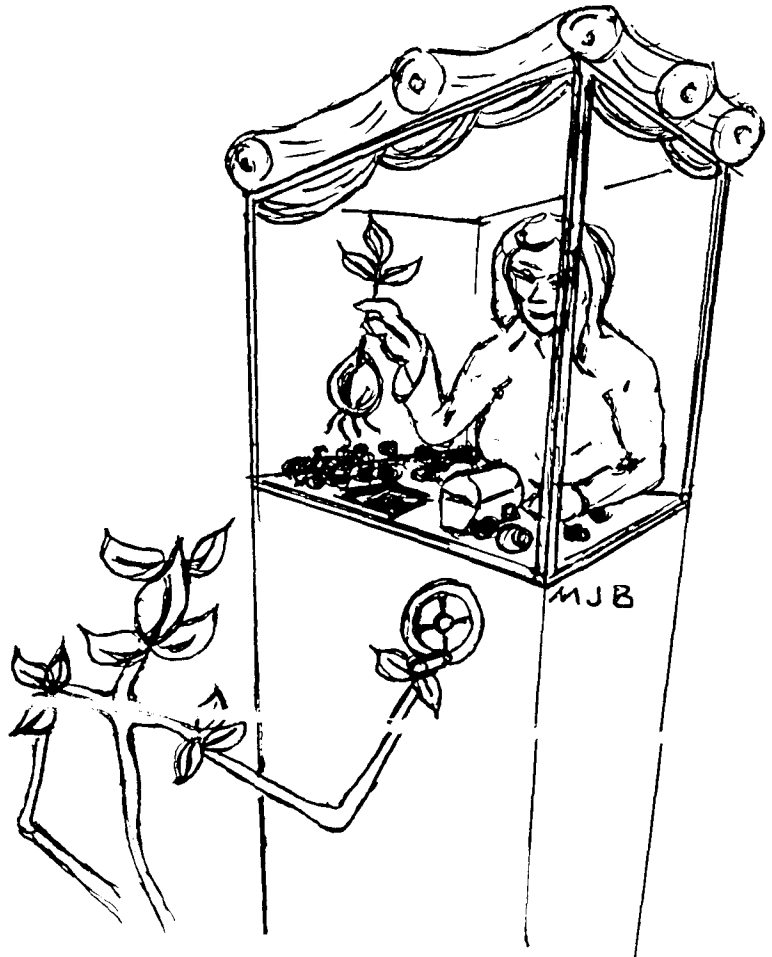
WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Cape gooseberry, Carambola, Carob, Cherimoya, Bitter melon, Durian, Feijoa, Guava, Litchee, Longan, Loquat, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Macadamia, Malanga, Mango, **Mangosteen**, Monstera, Name, Pepino melon, Papaya, Passion fruit, Prickly pear (pads & fruit), Tamarillo (orange and red varieties) Taro, and Water Chestnuts, White Sapote.

SEEDS

This month Bob is offering Tamarind and Tamarillo seeds. Both are easy to grow and very ornamental. (Ed. Tamarind is my very favorite pit! - beautiful from the day it pops out of the pit)

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.



Pits Annual Plant Sales & Cocktail Party

Wednesday, September 13th 6 pm-8 pm

251 West 11th Street

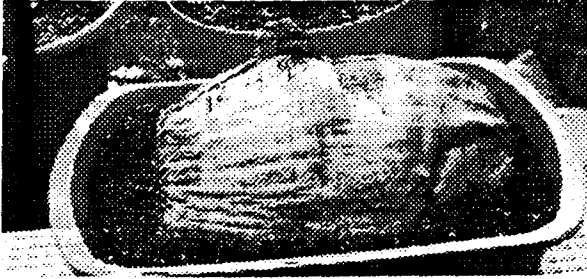
NYC, NY 10014

Anyone who lives within commuting distance of New York City is invited. We have not sold 251, therefore we will have our party as in years past. Come and meet the pits, both floral and fauna. The food is great and the company, if nothing else, unusual. We are featuring, small easy to bloom pits. To name a few,

Nashia (see May/June), *Murraya paniculata* (Orange jasmine), Surinam cherry (*Eugenia uniflora*) & *Triphasia trifolia* (Limeberry). Other larger plants will also be available. The descriptions will be at the meeting - it's not fair to describe them in the newsletter.

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

Cocos nucifera Coconut



Joseph Mule has cracked the coconut! He has actually grown one from seed! It took 18 months. His son brought him back a coconut he picked up off the street in Florida. No roots, leaves or splits in the husk were showing. The nut was a dull beige-gray color. He put it in a wide but shallow pot filled with potting soil and placed it in a sunny window in his warm furnace room. A year went by and Joseph forgot all about it. This spring, just as he was about to toss it out, he spotted many roots sprouting from the bottom. About 4-6 weeks later the outer husk split and a small green shoot appeared. He has since transplanted it to a much larger (5 gal.) pot and has it growing outside in his garden for the summer.

Coconuts are one of the most important crops in the world. A third of the population rely on the coconut for oil, milk, meat, timber and cloth. "He who plants a coconut tree," they say in the South Seas, "plants food and drink, vessels and clothing, a habitation for himself and a heritage for his children".¹ No part of the plant is wasted.

The origin of coconuts is uncertain, but they probably originated in the Malay Archipelago. Today they are considered

Pan-tropical and are found on the coasts of moist tropical lands 15° north and south of the equator. Contrary to popular myth, coconuts did not bobble along the tropical ocean currents around the world. They were brought by one seafaring community to another.

The coconut first appeared in the middle-east in Egypt in the 6th century. It had probably been imported by Arabian or Egyptian merchants from the Indian Ocean. In the Western hemisphere, coconuts are represented in pre-Columbian Peruvian pottery and in northern Chili. It is thought that the coconut reached American shores through the Pacific. How far did people travel East to West? (Kon Tiki?)

Any plant that is so important to man is bound to be steeped in folk lore and religion. Here are a few gems culled from Waverly Root:

"In Bali, women are forbidden to touch coconut palms lest the fertility of the tree be drained off into the fertility of the woman." (No comment)

"In Thailand, the first solid or semi-solid food a Brahmin baby is permitted to eat is three spoonfuls of the soft custardy meat of the immature coconut, fed to the infant by a priest."

"In Samoa, should you happen to spy an abandoned coconut, do not pick it up unless you are looking for trouble; someone knows it is there and has proprietary rights to it. If the law doesn't get you the *tapui* will- the *tapui* is a magical force which protects the fruit that is a taboo to everyone but its owner."

Technically the coconut is a "polymorphous, unbranched, unarmed palm."² The trunk is columnar and slightly

¹Food, Waverly Root, Simon and Schuster, NY 1980

² Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture, Ochse, Soule, Dijkman, & Wehlburg. Macmillan, London 1961

thicker at the base. A mature plant can attain a height of 100'. The 12' fronds are arranged spirally and form a feathery crown. Coconuts are floriferous, sending up flowering spikes 10-13 times a year. This incredible floriferousness has led to much cross fertilization and diverse variants among one species. Coconuts are all from the same species, *Cocos nucifera*, and can only be propagated vegetatively. Currently there is a blight on the coconut palm that grew in Florida. People are encouraged to plant the Malayan coconut that is immune to the blight. Both the Florida coconut and the Malay coconut are *Cocos nucifera*.

The fruits are 2 1/2 - 10" in diameter and can weigh as much as 6 lbs. The coconut is made up of an outer fibrous husk (pericarp) and inner bony seed (endocarp) that has three eyes, the coconut meat (albumen) is 1/4 - 3/4 " thick, and the central cavity that is filled with a sweet fluid.³

Contrary to popular belief, coconuts are not the largest seed in the world. Those honors go to a very rare palm, the sea coconut (*Lodoicea maldivia* or *sechellarum*) that grows on the island of Praslin in the Seychelles Islands off the East coast of Africa. Its seed weighs up to 45 lbs.

Culture:

If you wish to try your hand at a coconut, be sure to purchase one that is in the husk. If the husk is grayish vs green, it is more mature and will germinate more quickly.

Coconuts require a lean, sandy soil,

ample moisture, good light and warm temperatures. In nature they like to grow just above the high water mark (not readily accomplished in the home.) Night-time temperatures should not drop below 62°.

Coconut seedlings are adorable. Frequently the leaves break the husk before the roots develop. Years ago, at the Gramercy Park Flower Show, we had a very young coconut. It was not potted * and we could walk around the Show with this cute little palm cradled in our arms. We watered it by spritzing the basal depression. That little plant stole the show!

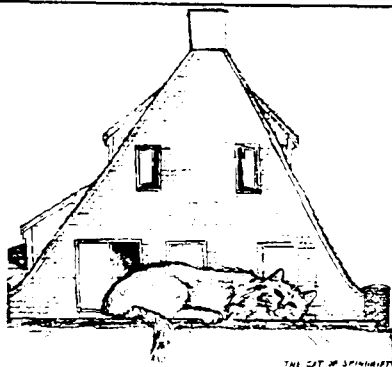


Once the roots develop, the coconut should be potted up with just the top of the husk showing. (In the field, coconuts are planted to a depth of 18" to 2') The diameter of the pot should be about 3" larger than the coconut.

They are slow growing in their early years. The pleated, linear leaves are about 18" for the first few years. They do not split into feathery fronds until they are about 5 years old. Coconuts are carefree plants to grow and wonderful conversation pieces.

*There is enough food and moisture in the coconut to keep the plant alive for a year or more.

³ Ibid



The Pits are slowly creeping into the 21st Century and have gone On Line. Our Am. On Line address is, Debpits@aol.com and our internet, Internet:Debpits@aol.com. Do let us hear from you we still love to get e-mail.

We have received so many requests for seeds and information about growing coffee that we have updated an old article. For those who have requested seeds, unfortunately we are sold out. Coffee trees bear in the late spring and mature in the early months of summer. Plants can only be grown from the seeds of freshly picked cherries. They do not grow from the "green beans" sold in some super markets.

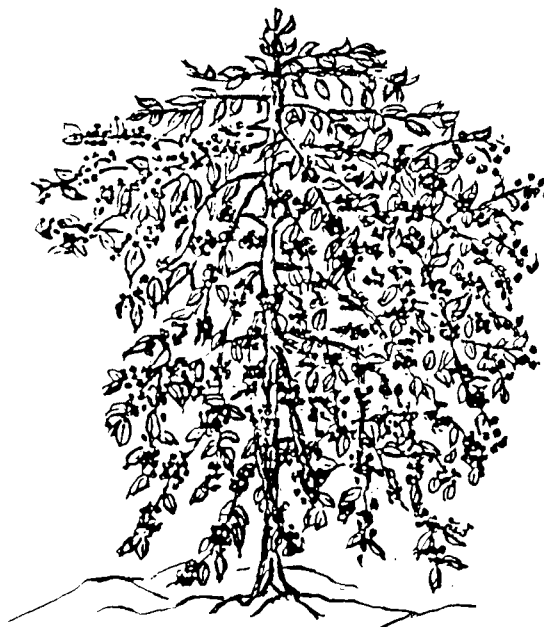
COFFEE

Coffea arabica

Coffee trees are one of the most decorative houseplants we can grow. The 4-6", dark, glossy green leaves resemble those of gardenias and are dense and luxurious. The small white flowers appear in clusters along the branches; they are slightly fragrant. These are followed by 1" oval green cherries that mature to red as they ripen. There are two seeds within the fruit which, when roasted are the coffee beans. The trees will flower in their third year, and set fruit in their fourth.

Coffee has a fascinating history, albeit a bit murky. It is generally agreed by experts that coffee originated in Ethiopia. "The eleventh-century Arab physician... known as Avicenna is said to have mentioned it, but there is great confusion in the early terminology. The word *kahwah* originally meant wine, but was later transferred to coffee, "the wine of Islam." (In later times, careful people gave the name *kihwah* to coffee to distinguish it from *kahwah* wine."

In the sixteenth-century, the popularity of coffee spread throughout the Middle-east, from Mecca to Cairo to Damascus and Constantinople. A Western traveler noted, " they usually (Turks) honored their guests with `a cup of coffa, made of a kind of seed called coava, and of



a blackish colour; which they drink so hot as possible they can." Another noted, "it prevents those who consume it from feeling drowsy. For that reason, students who wish to read into the late hours are fond of it." Not all Europeans were enchanted, Sir Thomas Herbert, " encountering it in Persia, described it as "a drink imitating that in the Stygian lake, black, thick and bitter."

Coffee did not gain popularity in Europe, until the seventeenth-century when the first coffee houses appeared. In England, coffee houses became exclusive "clubs", in France they became "cafes". Coffee was brought to the New World by the Spanish explorers. It was first cultivated in Brazil, but rapidly spread to the other countries of South America.

Coffee is one of the largest and most important agriculture crops in the world today. It has very specific growing conditions that limit its cultivation to the mountainous regions of the tropics. Ideal conditions include: temperatures between 65-70 degrees, high humidity and medium light. If you have ever seen the afternoon mists roll down the mountains in the Andes, you can envision the climate necessary for coffee's growth . Coffee will grow at lower altitudes where there are higher temperatures

and brighter light; the coffee produced, however, is weak and watery.

Coffee is a labor intensive crop. The individual cherries are harvested only when they are ripe. Since they do not ripen uniformly, the fruit must be hand picked. (Can you imagine what a cup of coffee would cost if we grew coffee in this country.?)

After harvesting, the seeds are culled from the cherries, washed, dried and then roasted. Each coffee cherry contains two seeds, covered by a silvery skin and parchment. The pulp and the parchment must be removed before the seeds can be roasted. (The beans are tasteless until they are roasted). The different types of roast determine the amount of oil and caffeine in the coffee. Strong coffees, such as French roast and espresso, have been roasted for a longer time and have less oil and caffeine. They may taste stronger, but have much less sleep disturbing caffeine than traditional American roasted coffee.

From Pit to Pot

Coffee is a rapidly growing, carefree plant that will flower and fruit in the home with only a modest amount of trouble. Most coffee plants grow about 1 foot a year and begin to flower in their third year, and fruit in their fourth.

How to grow:



1. Clean all the flesh from the cherries.

2. Sow the seeds in individual pots or community flats. Cover loosely with clear plastic wrap to insure humidity.

3. Give gentle bottom heat.

4. When the seedlings have 3-6 pairs of leaves, transplant to a 5-7" pot.

(Coffee trees should be "moved on" to larger containers as they grow; eventually ending up in a 5 gallon container)

5. Keep the soil evenly moist at all times, but not soggy and never let the plant sit in water.

6. Coffee requires medium light and can be grown in a 4 tube fluorescent light unit or on a sunny window sill.

When you put the plants out for the summer, place them in filtered light.

Direct sun will scorch the leaves.

7. Coffee is not a heavy feeder. Use 1/4th dilute fertilizer every month, except when the plant is resting in the winter.

8. Coffee trees are large house plants and should be allowed to grow to 4-5' if you want them to bloom and fruit. When they reach this height, you can nip the central leader (trunk) and heavily prune the side branches.

Harvesting:

A mature home-grown coffee tree will yield about 1 pound of cherries, enough for a cup, but hardly a threat to the industry. Clean and wash the seeds and place them in a shallow baking pan. Roast at 350 degrees, turning frequently until the seeds have turned a deep rich brown. The house smells heavenly when you roast the beans, unfortunately, the coffee that is produced on the windowsill is pretty dreadful.

BOOK REVIEW



The Oxford Book of Food Plants. Masfield, G.B., Wallis, M. Harrison, S.G., & Nicholson, B.E. Oxford University Press, London 1969.

One feels a little guilty reviewing a book that may be unavailable or even out of print. However, this slim volume is a classic and worth acquiring, if one collects fine volumes dealing with plants or food. It came to us on extended voluntary or involuntary loan from a "Pit" who originated in England. And, has been drawn to the closest facsimile of the English climate, Seattle, Washington.

The 206 pages are illustrated with excellent paintings of most of the world's edible plants. The plants are described botanically with a small bit on history and origins. Most of the temperate climate plants are described and I found no omissions in the tropics.

As I sit here in Massachusetts the Corn and Tomatoes are just coming in, and this volume reminds me how significantly different the English climate is from ours. They have to grow all hot weather plants under glass. How do the Dutch produce those thick skinned peppers?

Not all the plants are pits. There is a page on Sea Weeds that we have growing in abundance in our front yard. Although not widely consumed in this country Kelp or Dulse is consumed fresh and raw in England. On the Russia peninsula of Kamchatka it is made into an alcoholic beverage. (Is there any starch or sugar containing plant that hasn't been fermented into booze? Remember garlic wine?). As I sit here teenagers are using long rakes to harvest "Irish Moss" or Carrageen, a red frilly bottom growing sea weed that grows on our rocky shore and off the coast of Ireland and France. It has been harvested here since colonial times as a source of carrageenin, an edible emulsifier used in jellies, ice cream, salad dressings and soups to prevent the ingredients from separating.

This is a book that's fun to read if you enjoy filling your head with information that's mostly unimportant to most of us but makes life more interesting.

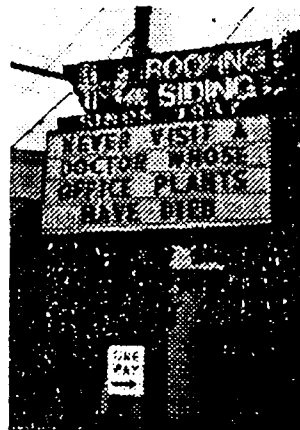
John Hart

Ed. Unfortunately, you must search for this book through rare book dealers. It's worth the extra time and money. A gem for any library.

NEED WE SAY MORE?

SIGN SPOTTED BY

CHRIS CARRDUS



SOUR CHERRY PICKLES

Prunus cerasus

16 "Kirby" cucumbers	12 whole pepper corns
4 Large sprigs of dill	2 cups of water
12 Unblemished sour cherry leaves	1 cup of cider vinegar
1/4 Cup salt	4 16 oz sterile canning jars

Soak cucumbers in water to cover overnight in the fridge to keep them crisp. Drain the cucumbers and stuff into the jars with one stalk of dill, three cherry leaves, and 3 pepper corns.

Bring water, vinegar and salt just to a boil in an enamel or stainless steel pot and pour into the jars. Fill to the brim, screw on the lids, let cool to room temperature and then refridgerate. They are ready to eat in

about a week.

These are quick pickles, and since they do not go through a fermentation ~~we~~ process, will keep only for about ~~w~~ weeks in the fridge. They are long gone before the 2 weeks are up.

The cherry leaves give a lovely earthy flavor to these spectacular pickles.

Jack Siman

PITS vs. PUSSIES

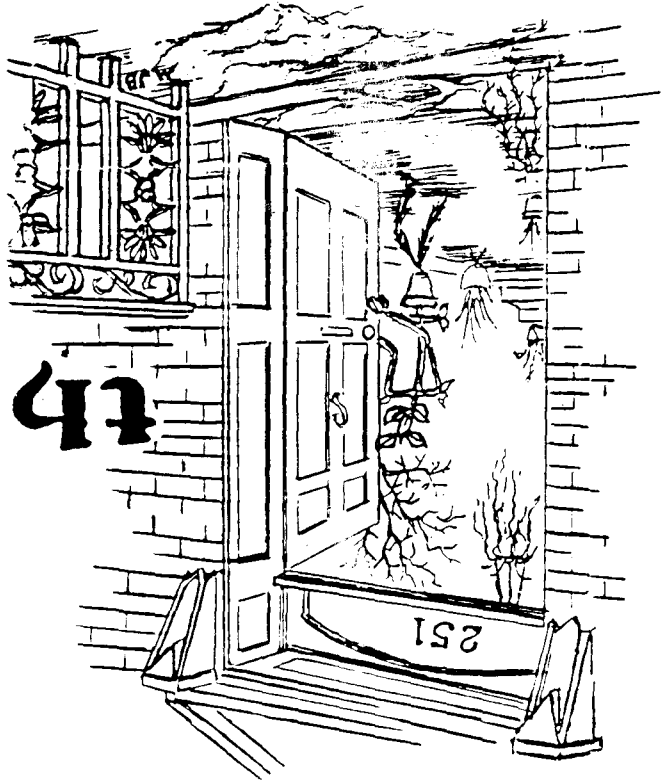
Less than 48 hours after we moved into our new house in Seattle, my step-daughter, the veterinary tech, turned up on the doorstep with a cat for us - a pretty 4-year old calico/tabby. Also, knowing my pit interests, she brought along a copy of one of her professional magazines with an article about plants harmful to cats. The article

emphasizes that all parts of the following plants are more or less poisonous to cats and should be avoided or kept out of their reach.

By me, any cat stupid enough to eat Crown of Thorns deserves all it gets, but some less obviously threatening pits are on the list. The article recommeris that you take the cat to the vet as soon as possible and bring along the plant in question for positive identification.

Alocasia	Cherry, most vars	Flax	Laurel	Pokeweed
Amaryllis	Cherry, ground	Four O'Clock	Lily of the valley	Poppy
Apricot	Chinaberry	Foxglove	Lily Spider	Potato
Arrowgrass	Christmas Rose	Golden Glow	Lily	Privet, Common
Avocado	Chrysanthemum	Gopher Purge	Locoweed	Rhododendron
Azalea	Clematis	Hellebore	Lupine	Rosary Pea
Baneberry	Cornflower	Hemlock, Water	Marigold	Rubber Plant
Bayonet	Corydalis	Hemlock Poison	Mistletoe	Scotch Broom
Beargrass	Crocus, Autumn	Holly	Mock Orange	Skunk Cabbage
Bird of Paradise	Crown of Thoms	Horse Chestnuts	Monkshood	Snow on the
Bittersweet	Cyclamen	Horsebeans	MorningGlory	Mountain
Black Locust	Daffodil Daphne	Horsebrush	Mushrooms	Snowdrops
Black-Eyed Susan	Daphne	Hyacinth	Mustard	Staggerweed
Bleeding Heart	Death Camas	Hydrangea	Narcissus	Star of Bethlehem
Bloodroot	Deadly Nightshade	Iris Ivy	Nightshade	Sweetpea
Bluebonnet	Delphinium	Jack in the Pulpit	Oleander	Tobacco
Boxwood	Dicentrea	Java Beans	Peach	Tomato
Buckeyes	Dumb Cane	Jerusalem Cherry	Peony	Virginia Creeper
Burning Bush	Eggplant	Jessamine	Philodendron	Weeping Fig
Buttercup	Elderberry	JimsonWeed	Pimpernel	Wild Call
Cactus,	Elephant Ear	Jonquil	Poinciana	Wisteria
Candelabra	Euonymus	Jungle Tnunpets	Poinsettia	
Caladium	Evergreen	Lantana	Poison Oak	
Cherry, Laurel	Ferns	Larkspur	Poison Ivy	

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