Rediscover Your Ability to Grow Your Own Food - Tome Shaaltiel

In Maryland, spring is the best time to start growing your produce. Every climate has a different growing season, but in most places in the world, spring symbolizes bloom, birth, new beginning. After taking a break, and a long winter rest it is time to go back outside and flourish. In the Jewish calendar we celebrate the holiday of spring, Passover. On Passover eve in the Jewish tradition, families gather in community and make a feast and share the story from slavery to freedom. It is tradition that you shall open your door to strangers and poor who don’t have a place to eat, all are welcome to celebrate together no matter your gender, race, religion. It is a time for all to join in community.

During this current crisis, more people can see the importance of growing one’s own food. Most countries are under lockdown and have stopped economic activities, but the food growers and sellers are declared as essential workers, alongside with healthcare providers, while the rest of the population is quarantined. It is clear now more than ever that growing food is a necessity for living and not just a chosen lifestyle or passion.

As Passover celebrate freedom, I encourage you and your community to take care of one another. Growing fresh local food enables accessibility to communities who suffer from food scarcity and don't have food sovereignty from before this crisis. The Baltimore City Food Environment 2018 Report says, "Of the approximately 621,000 people living in Baltimore City, 23.5% live in areas identified as Healthy Food Priority Areas." There are organizations who have already started caring for these communities such as Black Yield Institute and Soul Fire Farm. We can learn from them and empower each other to support society.

My way of helping my community is to offer you something I started doing in my own home. Instead of going out and buying fresh produce every week, use your vegetable scraps to reproduce the same vegetable. There is a term in farming and gardening called propagation, which is taking a living part of a plant to reproduce the same plant. There are many ways to do it and each plant requires different type of care, as they are different beings. These methods will also create less food waste if we start adding them to our daily norms. Also, since many stores and seed companies are facing seed shortages, it is a useful tool to know how to start plants a different way. There are challenges with this. I recommend using organic produce. Much produce that isn't grown organically, is genetically modified in a way that doesn't allow reproduction. Although, experiments are always welcome.

So how do you propagate your store-bought produce? Here is an assembly of examples:

1. **Seed Harvest:** produce you can harvest seeds from- (Solanaceae, cucurbit families)
   - pepper, tomato, cucumber, zucchini, squash, pumpkin, eggplant, melon, watermelon, also green beans, tamarind.
   The produce can be dried out or used fresh for seed harvesting. You get to use both the vegetable or fruit to eat and the seeds to grow. Some produce must be dried first such as: corn, rice, wheat, rye, cereal, barley, sunflowers.
a. If you dry the produce first, dry it whole on a plate or any open container with a wide surface in a sunny spot at home, and when dry open the fruit or vegetable and collect the seeds into a jar or a brown bag as shown in the photo below.

b. If you prefer to harvest from fresh produce cut it open with a kitchen knife and collect the sees into a glass of water to separate the flesh from the seed and mix with a spoon. Then poor the seeds and the water through a colander or use a packaging mesh bag to put over the glass with a rubber band as shown in the photo below.
2. **Sprouting**: produce such as dried legumes- *beans, chickpeas, peas, lentils, quinoa, peanut, etc.*

There are a few ways to sprout. **One way** is to place the dried legume on wet cotton ball material, wet paper towel in a sunny spot and make sure it is always damp. **Another way** is to place the dried legume straight in a bowl of water where you must change the water once or twice. After 2-3 days you will see the legume starting to sprout as shown in the photo below. Once it does let it sprout for 1-2 more days before planting in the soil.

![Sprouting Image]

3. **Propagate at stem plate**: produce such as root veggies- *beet, carrot, turnip, radish, horseradish, also pineapple.*

We all get rid of the part of the plant that connects to the leaves since we don't want to eat it. Instead we can save it. Make sure you cut off the leaves before you start and leave a little bit of the stem. You can either use a **hydroponic method** -place the stem plate in water and then transplant into soil once it grows roots and leaves as shown in photo below. This way you can see the regrowth of the roots. Make sure to change the water when it changes colors or add more water when evaporation occurs. Or simply plant straight into soil.

![Propagate at stem plate Image]
4. **Propagate at root base:** produce that is still connected to their roots or the base of the plant such as: *onion, leek, green onion, chives, celery, cabbage, kohlrabi, lettuce, lemon grass.*
   When you are cutting these produces for cooking you cut off the base of the plant where the roots are or where the plant was attached to the stem as shown in the picture below. Like example #3, you can use the **hydroponic method** or simply plant straight into soil.

![Image of propagated root base]

5. **Propagate tubers:** for produce such as: *potato, sweet potato, Jerusalem artichoke.*
   The part of these plants that we eat is called a tuber for these produces. If you forgot to use your *potatoes* in time and they started growing "potato eyes" that means they started to grow roots and are ready to be planted. Once they grow half an inch you can plant them a foot deep in the soil, you want a 2-3ft deep and large container or garden bed for that. Some say that if you chop the potato and separate the "eyes" then you will have a bigger yield. If you do that let the potato pieces dry for 1-2 days before planting in the soil. Every "potato eye" can grow one potato plant. Similar method can apply to *sweet potatoes.* It is possible to try the **hydroponic method** to start roots and leaves as well, if you do, make sure some of the tuber stays above water. With *Jerusalem artichoke* each tuber will grow one plant. In the photo below You can see harvested Jerusalem artichokes, in preparation for reproducing.

![Image of harvested Jerusalem artichokes]
6. **Cuttings:** for produce such as herbs: *mint, rosemary, lavender, sage, oregano, thyme, lemon balm, basil, tarragon, marjoram, catnip, nettle, lemon verbena, lemon geranium.*

When you buy a package of fresh herbs in the grocery store the herbs usually come with stems and leaves as shown in the picture below. The point where the leaves meet the stem are called nodes. When making a cutting, cut the herb with scissors or a kitchen knife between 2 nodes, at the stem, and have at least 3 nodes in your cutting. Trim off all the leaves except 1-2 at the top. For extra hormone boost dip the bottom end in honey and plant in the soil as shown in the picture below. Or use the hydroponic method as explained in example #3, to start roots and leaves growth before transplanting into soil. It is also possible to do fruit tree cuttings and grafting different kinds of trees together, which I won't get into detail here.

If you have any question or comments please feel free to contact me.
I hope these tools will be beneficial, work towards elevating society and encourage local fresh food for all.