

Growing plums from a stone pit

By Joseph Parish

I have not seen too many fresh plums in the grocery stores these days. I do not know if they are hard to come by, or just not as desirable as they used to be. I recently visited the Produce Junction in Dover, and discovered they currently are selling plums. I immediately purchased a small bag of these cherished fruits, and took them home. After eating the first one, I saved the pit in the hopes of growing my own plum trees.

My first thought upon staring at the pit was whether I could plant it or not. Surprisingly, the answer to that question is yes. The only problem here is that the tree that results from growing the pit may, or may not fruit. Even if it does produce fruit, there is a great possibility that the plum from the newly grown tree may be nothing like the one which gave you the original plum. This is a result of most fruit trees being propagated from rootstock, or the mother plant being grafted onto the tree to obtain a "true" copy of the plum. Planting your plum pit may likely result in a different variety from the original; in fact, in some cases the fruit may actually be inedible. In view of that planting the pit is easy, and produces considerably fun for the entire family.

How to Plant Plum Pits

When you consider planting a plum pit, first think about your geographic region. Plums grow best in USDA zones 5-9. Since where I live in Delaware is zone 7, we are good to go with planting. When planting fresh plum pits, you should initially remove the pit, and wash it well in lukewarm water, while using a soft brush to remove the attached pulp.

Since the seed of the plum requires a cool period of 33-41 F prior to germinating, it will require 10-12 weeks of these cool temperatures. In the agricultural circles this is known as stratification. There are two methods by which this can be accomplished. The first way is to wrap the pit in a moist paper towel, and place it in a plastic bag. Now put the bag in the refrigerator for 6 to 8 weeks. Keep a close eye on it just in case it sprouts earlier than expected.

Natural germination is also a possibility, whereas you place the pit directly in the ground during the fall, or winter season. Add some organic matter, but avoid putting fertilizer on the spot. Plant the plum seeds about 3 inches deep, and be sure to mark the spot where you planted them, so they could be found in the spring. Let the planted plum remain outside throughout the winter, and watch carefully for any possible sprouting. Once the new plant breaks ground, keep it moist. If you stratified the seed in the refrigerator, watch for possible sprouting, at which time plant the pit in a container of soil made of one-part vermiculite added to equal parts of potting soil. Plant the pit two inches deep and place the pot in a cool, bright location, being sure to keep the soil moist but not wet.

After the danger of frost has passed, select a location outdoors which received about six hours of direct sunlight daily. Dig a 12-inch-deep hole, and mix compost into the soil. Plant the plum pit and lightly tap the soil firmly. Water the plant, and keep it moist. You could place mulch, or compost around the bottom of your new plant to retain moisture. Feed the plant with 10-10-10 fertilizer during the early spring and in August.

You will need to have a lot of patience when planting the plum pits. If the tree bears fruit it will take several years. This is a fun project to teach kids about seeds and seed growth.