

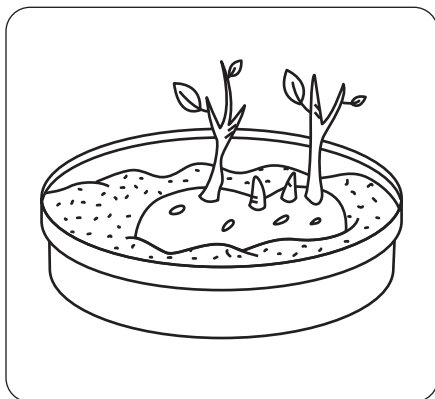


NATURE ACTIVITY:

Bonsai Potato

What You'll Need:

- ✓ Mom or Dad's help!
- ✓ Sprouted potato
- ✓ Shallow clay pot
- ✓ Potting soil
- ✓ Gravel (optional)
- ✓ Scissors
- ✓ Patience



The word Bonsai is Japanese and means "planted in a tray." The ancient art of bonsai involves choosing a young tree or other plant that would usually grow large and planting it in a container. Special care is then taken so the tree develops into its full natural shape and beauty in miniature. The difference between bonsai and ordinary potted plants is that usually the focus of the potted plant is on the flowers or leaves. With a bonsai, the beauty of the entire tree and how it looks in the container is what matters.

You can practice this ancient art form using an old potato. This is a perfect use for those recently rediscovered spuds that were forgotten in the pantry. All you need to do is plant it in a pot and with patience and careful pruning; you too can create a bonsai potato.

Directions:

1. Observe how the sprouts grow out of the potato. The sprouts become the branches so you'll want to plant the potato with these sprouts above the dirt.
2. Fill the clay pot with the potting soil.
3. Plant the potato in the pot so it juts out of the dirt. Your potato should be at least half way in the dirt.
4. Cover the dirt with the gravel.
5. Keep the soil moist being careful not to over-water. Too much water may cause the potato to begin to rot and smell bad. If the soil gets too dry, the plant draws moisture from the potato, which will shrivel, but the plant will survive.
6. A couple weeks after planting your potato, small leaves will form on the sprouts. The sprouts grow very slowly after it is planted. Shoots that come up from underground around the potato grow very quickly. Cut these shoots below the dirt line.
7. As the plant grows you'll need to keep the sprouts from growing too tall. Cut off the top growth tip with small scissors right before the first leaf. This stops the sprout's upwards growth and forces the plant to grow multiple branches.
8. Continue pruning as the plant grows.