

Plant Care and Americanization: A Personal View

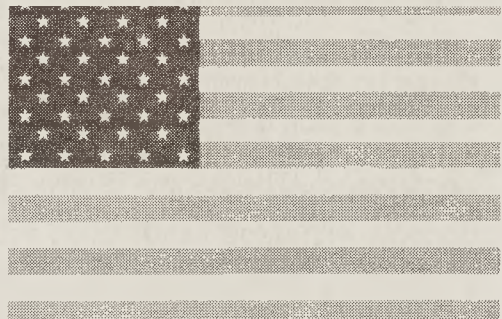
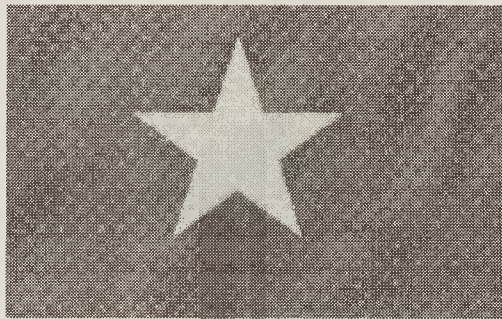
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With the fall of Saigon in March 1975, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese left their relatives, possessions, and memories behind in search of freedom and shelter from Communist rule. Every immigrant took with him a piece of Viet Nam. My family brought to America a guava sapling.

Because it was our last connection to Viet Nam, we cared for the sapling as if it were a baby. To assure that it remained purely Vietnamese, we left the guava in a pot of Vietnamese soil; its roots would never touch foreign soil. When the sun grew too hot, we sheltered it. When the weather turned cold, we took it inside. We gave it only the best and most expensive fertilizers. Never once did watering time pass without its receiving its formula.

Our sapling did not die. But it did not grow either, even with all the attention that was given to it. Against my family's initial wishes, the guava was eventually placed in American soil in the hope that it would

grow and flourish. Although at first the guava appeared weaker, it later began to grow and, after many years to bear fruit. The fruit from the now-mature guava has been unlike any found in Viet Nam. The



fruit is not sweeter or tastier; rather, it has its own unique flavor. Because it is neither a Vietnamese guava tree nor is there an American name for it, we call it a Viet-namese-American guava tree.

My family and I immigrated to America from war-torn Viet Nam in 1981. Our exit from Viet Nam involved open sea voyages in leaky, overcrowded

fishing boats — hence, the “boat people” — and long journeys on foot through revolution-torn Cambodia. We were subject to attacks by pirates and military forces. Reportedly fifty percent of the refugees perished in flight. We were lucky enough to survive and spent several months in crowded refugee camps in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong before entering the United States.

In adapting to the U.S. way of life, schisms tear at the very fabric of traditional Vietnamese culture. A question that I had to often answer involves whether I will adapt willingly to American values and traditions, and risk losing my culture, or hold fast to a culture that is obsolete by Western society. Yet in this battle of words and accusations — and generations — there lies no correct party. The Americanization of Vietnamese culture, I think, involves a mutual expansion of both that which is American and that which is Vietnamese. All cultures change. Whether in Viet Nam or in the United States, new traditions are

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