

How to Grow Carrots on Mars

by Rod Belt

Theme: This drama could be used at Harvest, thanksgiving or any time you want to make the point that this world is wonderful!

Astronaut ALICIA enthusiastically explains how fascinating Mars is and what she will need to do to grow food there. Gardener JACK can't see what the fuss is about - his carrots just grow! What an amazing world we have!

Cast:

VINCE	A roving reporter for local TV news. He smiles a lot, particularly at the audience. JACK flusters him a little.
BREWSTER	
ALICIA	A local girl who has become an astronaut and is about to be part of the first manned mission to mars. She speaks knowledgeably and enthusiastically, is polite throughout and shows a real interest in JACK's point of view.
WENTWORTH	
JACK DUGGAN	Gardner who has just won a prize for the best carrots. He is knowledgeable and a bit lost in wonder and as he explains things he excitedly illustrates them with his hands using big, bold movements. Towards the end gets dreamy and poetic.

Notes: The characters should acknowledge the presence of the audience, treating it as a live audience at the show.

VINCE is dressed smartly, wearing a tie and maybe a suit.

ALICIA should be dressed in "astronaut casuals" – one-piece jumpsuit with cap and mission patches (you can purchase genuine patches from the NASA shop or use scout patches etc.)

JACK looks as though he has come straight from gardening. His excitable illustrations in the air as he speaks provides the main visual element of the piece so make the most of it!

Language note – window box - you might call this a window flower box or planter.

(VINCE stands centre holding a clipboard. JACK and ALICIA stand on either side.)

VINCE Welcome back, I'm roving reporter Vince Brewster and today I'm at the County Show - on the tables around me you can see just a small selection of the vegetables, fruits, cakes and pies that have been winning prizes. I have two guests here with me, one is special guest judge at this show, local girl and astronaut Alicia Wentworth. Hello Alicia!

ALICIA Hello Vince!

VINCE I also have with me Jack Duggan who has just won first prize for the best carrots at the show. Jack, how much did they weigh?

JACK It's not about weight! What's the point of a big vegetable if it doesn't taste good on a plate? My carrots *(picks up a bunch of carrots from the table)* were best overall. The judges looked at all aspects of the carrot including *(proudly indicates each item with his hands as he talks. You can make this quite exaggerated)* colour, shape, texture and of course taste. Here *(breaks one in half and offers half to each person)* have a bite!

VINCE *(Not eating his carrot)* Er - wonderful. And what's your secret? Why are yours the best?

JACK *(conspiratorially)* I sing to them at night.

VINCE Really? That's why yours are better?

JACK *(Laughing)* No! I make sure the soil is good and I nurture them and care for them and watch out for pests - and then I sing to them at night.

VINCE *(Unsure now if JACK is joking)* Right. Good. So, were there many entries?

JACK Yes. There are hundreds of different categories of produce *(indicates food on tables)* and all sorts of people enter - men and women, old guys and children, anyone can grow tasty food in the good earth or bake it into something wonderful. This here is a fruit cake baked by a nine year old and I think it is superb. Go on, try a piece.

(Jack cuts a slice from the cake and hands it to Vince, who struggles to hold on to carrot, cake and clipboard and so has to start eating the cake.)

VINCE *(Between bites of cake)* Thanks. Now local girl and astronaut Alicia Wentworth is also here. Alicia, welcome and congratulations on the exciting news that you have got a place on the crew of the very first manned mission to Mars!

ALICIA Hello Vince! Thank you. It's wonderful to be here!

VINCE So, you'll be departing for Mars next year - how long will it take?

ALICIA Each way is about seven months and we spend sixteen months on the surface so all together we'll be gone for two and a half years.

VINCE Wow! That's a long journey - won't you get bored?

ALICIA Well, there will be plenty to do but you are right, it is a very long time. Fortunately I love books and will be able to read to my heart's content!

VINCE And when you are bored of books?

ALICIA I've been learning to crochet and it will be fascinating to see how that goes in zero gravity!

VINCE Crochet – who would have thought it? Now Mars is an absolutely fascinating planet isn't it?

ALICIA Yes, people have been observing Mars for thousands of years and they have had big questions. Is there water? Is there life? Could there in fact be Martian civilisations?

VINCE So are there Martians?

ALICIA No! But Mars is the most Earth-like of the planets and the hope is that one day we can live there.

VINCE Fascinating! Now this (*indicating his surroundings*) is at heart an agricultural show and once you get to Mars it will be your job to investigate ways to grow food there – maybe carrots like Jack's?

ALICIA Absolutely. If people are going to live there they will need to grow their own food. Martian soil is very different from ours and plants won't grow in it directly but we know it does contain the right minerals so we need to find how to get them out.

JACK (*To no-one in particular*) Here you just buy carrot seeds, put them in the ground and they grow! Amazing! (*He mimes sowing seeds as if in soil in the air in front of him as he talks.*)

ALICIA Yes, it won't be quite so easy on Mars, for the foreseeable future anything grown there will be in some sort of nutrient solution rather than soil.

VINCE (*Almost interested*) So that needs water - will you find water lying around?

JACK (*In his own world, continuing from his last line, straight to audience and continuing to illustrate everything in the air with his hands.*) You can also grow them in window boxes and other containers. The first leaves show after a couple of weeks and you can eat the carrots about three months after sowing.

VINCE (*pointedly ignoring JACK*) Alicia, water?

- ALICIA *(Was listening to Jack but now comes back to the question)* Er - there are no rivers or seas but we believe we can unlock water from ice particles in the ground. We are also pretty sure that there are masses of ice at the Martian poles but that would need melting and moving, which is an enormous job.
- JACK *(To no-one in particular)* It falls from the sky here.
- VINCE Sorry?
- JACK Water. Once you have stuck your carrot seeds in the ground sooner or later *(illustrates with big hand gesticulations, almost dreamily)* water just falls on them from the sky – what we call rain. Amazing when you think about it – water falling from the sky! Who would have thought it?
- ALICIA True, Mars lacks most of the natural bio systems that support life here on Earth...
- JACK *(To audience, still on his own theme)* A child can do it all actually, growing things in the ground – it's not rocket science! If the rain isn't falling regularly you just collect it in a bucket when it does and use it when you need to. Brilliant!
- VINCE Anyway, back to Mars...

What more does Jack have to say about the wonder of the Earth? Does Alicia agree? Does anyone know what a “natural bio system” is? Does Vince ever say anything worthwhile?

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