



VACATION HOMES come in many architectural styles but favorites for interior finishing are ceiling tile and woodgrain finished hardboard wall paneling. These products are easy to install and have been designed for the craftsman who likes to do it himself. The life-like plastic beams are lightweight, rigid polyurethane.

The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

Language of flowers: Back in grandmother's day flowers in the form of bouquets were collected to express an intimate feeling. Certain leaves represented days of the week. Sunday was distinguished by a simple olive leaf.

Today, flowers have certain meanings, and some of them are amusing. Here are a few I have lifted from my book on "Raising Plants Indoors."

Camellia: means, You're a flame in my heart. Carnation: I'm carrying the torch for you. Chrysanthemum: You're a wonderful friend. Daffodil: The Sun is always shining when I'm with you. Daisies: I'll Never tell. Gardenia: You're Lovely! Lilac (purple): First emotions of love. Lilac (white): Youthful innocence. Spider flower: Elope with me. Sweet peas: Thank you for a lovely time. Stephanotis: Will you accompany me to the East? Tulip (red): I love you, believe me. Zinnia (mixed): In memory of absent friends.

STARTING SEEDS indoors: It'll soon be time to start your own plants from seeds indoors. Watch out for that bucket of soil you scooped up from the garden last fall before the ground froze.

That soil is the worst thing you can use to start new plants from seeds. Why? Mainly because it's too heavy or because it's loaded with billions of disease germs which will attack the tiny seedlings.

Florists have long given up on starting seed in soil. They use soil substitutes such as perlite, vermiculite, sand, peat, all in mixtures. Seeds do not need a rich soil for germination. The lighter the soil, the better.

Incidentally, those potting soils you buy in stores aren't always the best for starting seeds. Such soils contain a lot of humus (muck) and can be loaded with harmful organisms which pounce on the tiny seedlings. If you use any garden soil in your mixture, better be safe and bake the mixture in an oven at 180 degrees for half an hour.

GREEN THUMB CLINIC: A reader writes: "We kept our geraniums in a tub in the cellar and they are four feet high now. Please tell me how we can manage these so they will be suitable for memorial day?"

Answer: I'd cut each one back to within four inches and pot them up in a four-inch pot, using a mixture of sand, peat and loam, equal parts. Grow geraniums in a bright window and keep the soil uniformly moist at all times. Avoid overwatering and prolonged drying out of

soil as it may check the growth.

If the tip cuttings are green, no reason why you can't start these in a pot of perlite or vermiculite, and have a batch of flowering plants by the time Memorial Day rolls around. Geraniums need a bright window, five or six hours of sunlight a day.

Eventually the night came when it was ready to bloom. Slowly, but visibly, the petals spread and the delightful tropical fragrance was released to perfume the room.

It took several hours before the petals were fully unfolded and the blossom was revealed in all its glory—wine tinged on the outer petals but pure white inside. The opened blossom was over seven inches in diameter.

By the following morning the petals had folded and the

flower was almost closed again. It never reopened but hung on the plant for several days more and then dropped off.

Unlike the prickly spined cacti of the desert, this night-blooming cactus and other cacti with leaves or with flat leaf-like stems are denizens of moist, humid tropical forests. Many are epiphytes, supported by trees or other sturdy plants, but getting their moisture and nourishment from the air through aerial roots.

Ida Neal waters the "Queen of the Night" with collected rain water or with water from melted snow. This is standard procedure with the Neals for all of the many interesting, exotic plants they grow.

Now the Neals are wondering when their "Queen of the Night" will reward them with another spectacular, though ephemeral, bloom.



HERBERT NEAL displays his night-blooming cactus. (Evert photo)

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Botanically Speaking

Our Suburban Gardener Witnesses A Blessed Event

By BETTY FRANKEL

"It's opening tonight!" announced Herbert Neal when he telephoned to invite a few interested friends and neighbors to view the flowering of his night-blooming cactus. This blessed event of the botanical world is a rare and fascinating performance.

The night-blooming cactus, also known as "Queen of the Night," is a type of cactus rather closely related to the popular Christmas cactus. It has flat leaf-like branches and round climbing stems which Neal has fastened to a tall support.

There are several kinds of night-blooming cacti, native to Mexico, Cuba and Brazil. The Neals, however, are not sure of the exact botanical identification of their plant. Neal has raised it from a cutting given to him by a friend a couple of years ago.

For most of the year the big cactus is kept in their family room near a sunny, south-facing window, but the bud formed in early fall while the plant was vacationing on the backyard patio.

For many weeks it hung near the top of the plant, a wine-purple, pipe-shaped tube, growing longer and more hooked as time passed.

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