

## The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

**Snails and Slugs:** This is a good time to be on the watch for slugs or snails. Slugs are snails without shells. A snail is capable of withdrawing its body inside a hard shell. Slugs don't have the hard shell. Both lay eggs in masses of from a few to 40 or more, in a moist location, and one pest alone can lay as many as 100 eggs.

Snails do heavy damage because of the many "teeth" they have to satisfy their hungry appetite. One common slug in a garden or greenhouse has 85 teeth in a single row, and there are 100 rows, making a total of 8,500 teeth in a single critter.

Slugs live where there is dampness, since these night marauders like it moist during the day, when they hide under boards, leafy trash or stones. At night they do their dirty work. Slugs and snails travel along with a sliding movement on their "foot" exuding a slimy mucus to lubricate their trail. That silvery track you see on the ground or on plants is the mucus secreted by these gruesome pests.

**CONTROL:** Grow tomatoes on wire fence to keep them off the ground. In the garden or strawberry patch, place dampened shingles, boards, etc. between the rows so the pests will hide under them during the day, then go out and scrape them off and destroy.

Beer in pie plates around the tomato vines will attract and kill slugs. Beer is cheaper and safer to use than poisonous baits.

**CUCUMBERS AGAIN:** I've had many letters asking why cucumbers tend to produce nubbins or misshapen fruits. Nubbins and crooks among cucumbers, as we mentioned recently, are the result of improper pollination. Do not move the vines any more than necessary while cultivating or picking fruit. Moving the vines destroys blossoms, drives away bees, results in kinking and matting of vines, and tends to increase the number of misshapen fruits.

Cukes are very shallow rooted and sometimes roots will extend beyond the tips of the vines. That means after the vines have started to ramble freely, cultivation should stop. Bitter taste among cucumbers can be blamed on weather changes. Sharp drop in temperature following a warm spell causes bitterness.

**GREEN THUMB CLINIC:** A reader writes: "Please tell me what pulled my tomato and pepper plants out? I noticed they had been pulled right out of the ground, and some of the tips were snapped off."

Answer: Starlings or

grackles were probably responsible. They'll swoop down and snap the tips off, or even pull the plants out of the soil. Cover plants with bushel baskets or crates.

## Build-Your-Own Play Areas Inexpensive

Play areas needn't be lavish layouts with an array of expensive equipment. Many play items most children seem to enjoy can be built easily at home with western wood, as a way to keep children from roaming too far in search of fun.

One basic for smaller children is a sandbox. It should be big enough for several tots to move about in without crowding.

A solid box can be built of 2x12-inch western pine or fir,

on 4x4-inch posts set 18 inches in the ground. The wood should be surfaced to avoid splinters and treated with a preservative to resist decay.

**SEATING** can be added with a cap of eight of 10-inch boards around the box or on two sides, or by adding triangular pieces at corners. These also will lend strength to the box.

A sandbox should be built where it will be in the shade of a building or tree during the hottest part of the day.

A cover of plywood or chicken wire on a lightweight wood frame will keep cats out at night.

A variation is the sand table, about five by three feet, and set on 4x4-inch posts about coffee table height. The sides are of 1x6-inch boards, with a 1x2-inch cap. Bottom is 3/4-inch plywood.

The table can be moved into carport or garage on rainy days.

**ANOTHER** attraction children look for is something to climb, swing on, and jump from. This can be a simple L-shaped or rectangular frame of 4x4 or 4x6-inch fir or pine posts and beams, set securely in concrete.

Ropes can be secured to the beams for climbing, and ladders of 2x2-inch wood built onto the ends. A row of heavy dowels or pipes between two

## Pinch To Avoid Spindly Mums

Avoid long and spindly chrysanthemums this fall by proper pinching now, recommends a Michigan State University floriculturist.

William Carpenter says that pinching mums removes the young, growing tips. This makes the plants branch out. Plants don't get so long and spindly, and they produce more flowers, adds the floriculturist.

Pinching mums isn't difficult, he says. Just remove the top half inch of each shoot. This is usually done by pinching a shoot between the

thumb and forefinger, and then removing it.

A few days later, new side branches will start to form, explains the floriculturist. When side branches become about six inches long, pinch them.

Continue this procedure until about June 15 for early flowering varieties, July 1 for mid-season varieties and July 10 for late flowering varieties. After these dates, flower buds will be starting to form.

So remember, for better mums this year, pinch now.

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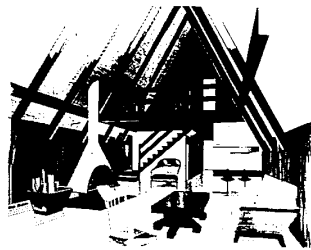
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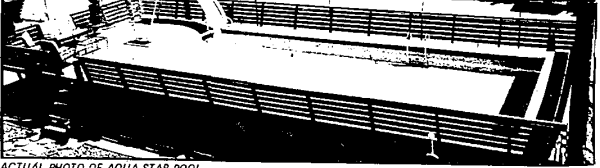
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