

Plant to show special bloom

After 20 years of growth, the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens' *Agave pedunculifera* is finally preparing itself to bloom in the Desert House of the gardens' conservatory.

This succulent is an unusual plant. Instead of blooming yearly, it grows for 20 years or more before it sends up a flowering stalk.

First noticed in early October by the Botanical Gardens' horticulturist, the quick-growing stalk, now nine feet tall, can grow several inches in a day. Depending on the species, these flower stalks may be from six to 30 feet tall.

There is one sad note to this exciting occurrence. Once the plant has blossomed, the mother plant dies. All of its available energy is spent producing the towering flower stalk. Future plants grow from seeds, bulbils and vegetative offshoots called pups.

The agave may be viewed 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Admission to the conservatory is \$2 for adults; \$1 for school-age children, free for preschool children. Complimentary admission is offered 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday and Saturday.

To get to the gardens, take US-23

north and exit on Plymouth Road. Turn right, take Plymouth Road east one mile to Dixboro Road and turn right. The gardens are ¼-mile on the left side of Dixboro Road.

Mature agaves don't automatically bloom when they reach a certain age. The prevailing weather plays a role in stimulating flowering. When the conditions are likely to allow successful reproduction and set seed, the plant will bloom.

Agaves grow in habitats that lack abundant rainfall, or in which water drains away quickly.

Seminars slated

English Gardens will conduct free educational seminars this January and February on topics ranging from winter survival for house plants to do-it-yourself landscaping.

The weekly seminars, open to the public, will take place 7 p.m. Wednesdays at the West Bloomfield store, 6370 Orchard Lake Road, north of Maple. For more information, call (810) 851-7506.

Topics, speakers and dates are: "Winter Survival for House Plants," Diane Tuccini, Jan. 10; "Attracting Birds to Your Yard," Bill Stafford, Jan. 17; "Arranging Silk Flowers and Plants," Donna Matte, Jan. 24; "Herbs/Seed Starting," Katie Krisko, Jan. 31; "Using Ornamental Grasses in Your Garden," Kevin Collins, Feb. 7.

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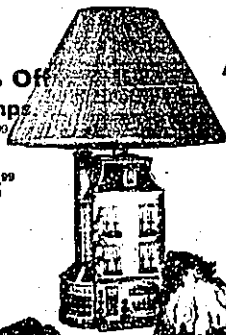
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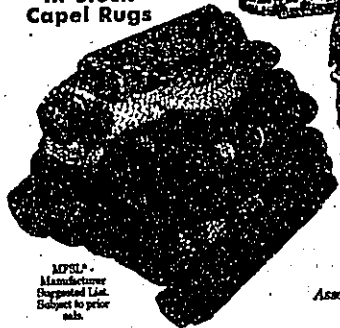
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