

A tropical isle's 'clime' flowers on Grand River

By CORINNE ABATT

FARMINGTON—There's a gem of a tropical isle right in downtown Farmington. So for those who missed the sun, white beaches and Caribbean waters, how about the next best thing?

A visit to Lawrence Mayer Florist, 3304 Grand River, could tide you over until the March winds subside and the April sun rounds the horizon.

From the coffee trees of South America to the bougainvillea of old Mexico, the banksia of South Africa and the leucandron of Zanzibar, they're all there.

Add literally dozens more—vermillion from Puerto Rico, the myriad species of halconia, torch ginger looking like enormous red roses dipped in hot wax, antherium with its brilliant red free-form blooms, potted anemones, freesia and giant primroses—March-tired eyes turn glassy.

A tour through the shop past veronica lilac, the tall loquat plants, through a grove of poodle-cut Australian Brush Cherry past a border of potted copper king gazania, a tropical double of the dandelion, and the reality of the tropical clime is complete.

MAYER IS ONE of the few constant shippers of flowers and plants from California, Hawaii and Puerto Rico. They come by plane. The flowers, orchids, for instance, are individually hand-wrapped in tissue with a balloon of water attached to the stem. The order is loosely packed in shaggy banana paper. The plants are packed in the same paper.

Plants are shipped in aluminum containers which fit between the floor and the hull of the wide body jets such as the DC 10.

The great majority arrive in perfect condition and the few times the shipment has been ruined through exposure to cold has not been a result of

the plane trip, Mayer says, but being left outside too long during the unloading.

Airlines, he said, which are willing to handle perishables (and not all are) usually do an excellent job. He recalls a large shipment arrived last Valentine's day in sub-zero temperatures in perfect condition.

UNFORTUNATELY IF THERE is careless handling and consequent freezing, it is often at holiday time when the airline personnel are overburdened. This, however, is also the florist's busiest season.

It is the Japanese growers in California whom Mayer credits with being some of the most skilled in the world. He makes regular trips to the West Coast to develop contacts with these small businessmen, many of whom don't grow or ship commercially.

From one he pleads for a precious few pots of anemones, from another the lovely yellow freesia which looks like a long-stemmed crocus, and from yet another, a few giant primroses.

"They never ship as much as you ask for, and the only way they will do business with you is if you mention the name of another supplier who is a friend or relative. If you choose a plant that's their favorite, they won't sell, no matter what you offer."

This is true of the Bonsai trees which the Japanese gardeners regard second only to their family members. Still, some such as the tiny junipers, maples, elms and a delicately shaped larch displayed in a special room of the Farmington store, have come through.

INDEPENDENCE NOTWITHSTANDING, Mayer said these people "are fantastic growers."

"They are born with a love for and deep appreciation of plants."

And for some unexplainable reason, the California imports make the trip

better and upon arrival acclimate themselves better to the Midwestern environment than any others.

Most of the Japanese growers are near the Los Angeles area which Mayer calls "the largest flower market in the world."

Once the tropical flowers arrive, they are housed in a glass case with the heat carefully controlled to 60 degrees.

Flowers indigenous to this area are maintained in a 40 degree climate.

THE TROPICAL BLOOMS serve as all-occasion flowers for home, party and funeral arrangements the same as the less exotic ones.

"The difference," Mayer said, "is that we have trained our clientele to ask for the unusual."

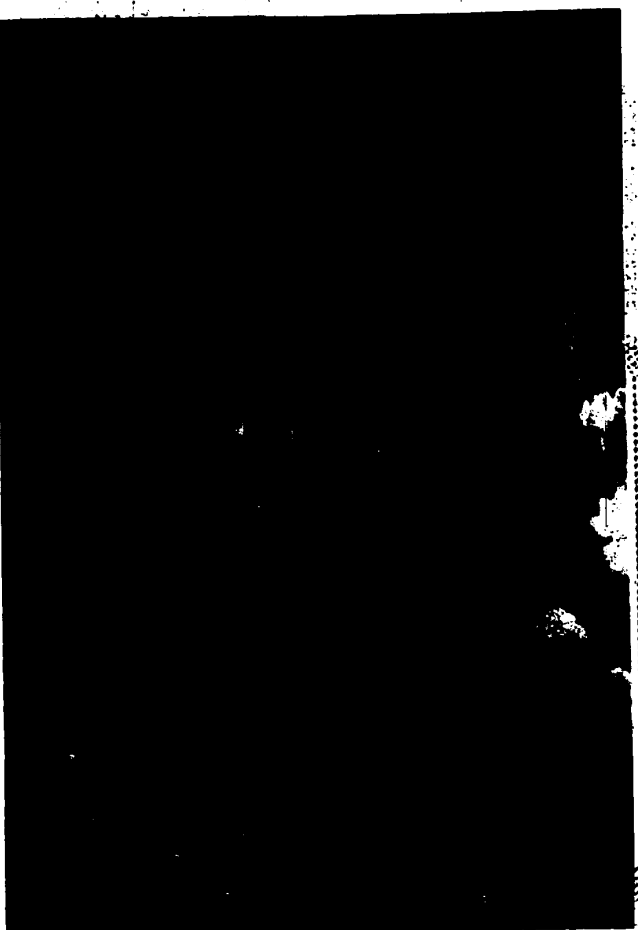
And to keep that clientele coming back for more, Mayer employs a staff at the airport almost every day to pick up shipments. For two days recently, they unloaded two 4,000-pound aluminum containers of plants—which amounted to seven truckloads before all were safely transported to the store.

Many of the plants border on full-size trees. With the growth of the apartment and condominium way of life, the tropical trees are ideal because they can live on a patio or balcony in warm weather and inside during the cold months, Mayer said.

Species such as the unusual Azalea tree, a tall eucalyptus, ceptote, a citrus with fruit as large as a small watermelon, a coffee tree and many more are popular.

While this touch of the tropics doesn't include a sandy beach or moonlight nights, it is cheaper, \$15 to \$20 for the potted plants and \$50 for your own coffee tree.

And chances are they will outlast a sunny month or three away from home.



Hard to find plants, freesia and anemone rate a tender, loving look from Kim Schnaibli of Farmington.



The pale pink azalea blossom is unusual because it grows on a tree about six feet high. The trees take years to develop, but do well in sheltered areas or inside during winter months. (Staff photos)

Beautification commission sells 8 varieties of trees

FARMINGTON HILLS—Eight species of trees are being made available at discount prices through the Farmington Hills Beautification Commission.

The deadline for ordering the trees is Friday, April 18. All trees are potted.

Five or more will be delivered in the Farmington area free. There will be a delivery fee of \$1.50 per tree for less than five.

Trees can be picked up at the Steinkopf Nursery, 28815 Farmington Road, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, April 26.

The kinds being offered are:

Silver maple is a fast growing cutleaf tree with silvery cast leaves and bark. It reaches a height of 80-90 feet and will grow in heavy, moist soil.

The cost of a 10-12 foot silver maple is \$14.50.

Thornless honey locust is a rapid growing variety which reaches 50-60 feet. It tolerates heavier soil which must be well drained. It has slender, fern-like, light green foliage which turns a clear yellow in fall. A 10-12 foot tree costs \$18.50.

RUSSIAN OLIVE is recognizable for its silvery gray foliage and fragrant yellow flowers. This distinctive tree grows to about 20 feet in height. A three to four foot tree is \$8.

Marshall's seedless ash is a hardy, rapid-growing species with rounded head and dense dark, shiny green foliage. It grows to 80 feet and will stand wet soil. An eight to 10 foot tree costs \$18.50.

Mountain ash has small compound leaves, white blossoms and bright orange fruit. It reaches 40 feet and requires well-drained soil. An eight to 10 foot tree is \$14.50.

Flowering crabapple, white, pink or red grows to 25-30 feet. Four to five foot trees are \$7.50 each.

Washington hawthorn is characterized by dense, low-growing foliage which turns gold, orange and red in the fall with bright red fruit. It has white flowers in the spring and grows to 25-30 feet. A five to six foot tree costs \$14.50.

Red bud is best known for its bright pink blossoms in early spring. It thrives in the shade of larger trees in rich, humus soil. It reaches 25-30 feet. The price for a five to six foot tree is \$9.50.

Farmington Hills Beautification Commission
6th annual tree planting program

Number of Trees..... Total Cost.....

Delivery Charge is \$1.50 per tree if less than five are ordered.

Name

Address

Telephone No..... Date.....

Make checks payable to: Farmington Hills Treasurer
Mail to: 31555 Eleven Mile Road, Farmington Hills, Mich. 48024

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