



474-5170

## 'Green thumbs' help others

By SUSAN AVERILL

People who have green thumbs should use them to help other people grow, said Mrs. Vernon Vickland.

Mrs. Vickland, a Farmington Hills gardener, has used garden therapy to help deaf youngsters at Woodcreek Elementary School and groups of institutionalized adults in Detroit.

Plants, she said, seem to instill a sense of quietness and tranquility, besides providing an interesting pastime.

"PLANTS ARE a perfect tranquilizer, they're so peaceful."

The windows of her house on Mullane are outlined with greenery. Her patio is decorated with potted plants and she keeps several garden plots in her backyard.

"Every morning after I send my hisband off to work, I take a walk around the garden to see how everything has grown."

thing has grown."

"Mrs. Vickland's work with garden therapy stemmed from a similar project begun by her garden club, Hill and Dale. More than 16 years ago, the group heard Alice Burlingame, a well-known Birmingham gardener, speak on the concept.

Afterward, they decided to adopt it as a club project. Members of Hill and Dale now work in rarsing homes, veterans' hospitals and in senior citivating complayer.

zens' housing complexes.

They recently won a national garden club award for their work in garden therapy, receiving a 90 of 100 possible points. The one point was subtracted because the group worked with Farmington children only twice a month instead of every week, Mrs. Vickland said.

In spite of their hearing handicap, Mrs. Vickland said her Woodcreek students have no trouble understanding her. They lip read.

They start them in school when the children are two and a half to five and start them immediately in speech therapy.

"I HAVE NO trouble communicating with them at all. Most of them are at their regular grade level and have a speech impediment. After all, they can't hear."

Some of the students are integrated

Some of the students are integrated into regular classrooms for topics like math where their handicap is not as evident.

Hill and Dale members work with 190 children in special education and five or six of those are Mrs. Vickland's charges.

Every other week she will bring in the materials for a project. All the materials are natural, she said.

The students have made corn husk dolls, calendars of dried flowers and bird feeders of peanit butter, seeds and pine cones. They have made Valentine cards with dried flowers and written verse for the inside

They have an opportunity to take cuttings and grow plants throughout the winter in portable greenhouses owned by the garden club.

owned by the garden club.

Come spring, Mrs. Vickland supervises plantings of herbs and tomatoes

and the cuttings which survived and rooted.

"The little ones like plants that flower, like imputients and begonias," she said. Not only is it easier to watch the plants progress, but it's more color-

She also works once a month with an adult group in Detroit.

"MOST OF THEM have had some kind of mental or institutional life. Some have no relatives. They seem to be a rather lonely group, living from day to day."

Meeting in Moross House, the group will have ten and cookies and look at slides or work on a craft project. They have been working a small vegetable garden and planted petunias around the house.

"Maybe through gardening we can start something really new for these people who really have no future," she said.

One woman in the group who had never participated in any. Moross House programs suddenly started working with the petunias, to the amazement of her courselors.

Mrs. Vickland adds a note of caution for those would-be therapists: "They can tell who cares and who doesn't care. You shouldn't do it because you think they need you. It's something you have to want to do, something you'll like and be genuinely interested in."

Of course, interest in plants has been spreading through the rest of society, too.

"It's fascinating to see how plant interest has come along. Teenagers and even youngsters are interested."

Both of her daughters grow plants and make macrame plant hangers. Often they will exchange plants as gifts, she said.

She attributes her own interest to her Nebraska childhood.

"WE HAD A five-acre garden we used to have to keep up. I didn't like it then, I guess because it was a duty. But it became imbedded in me to work outdoors.

I remember my dad used to love to walk through the garden with his hands behind his back, looking at everything."

"I remember my dad used to love to walk through the garden with his hands behind his back, looking at everything"

Her 100-member garden club meets monthly at the Farmington Community Center. They make handicrafts of their garden harvests and sell them at an annual "boutique." They also hold Christmas walks and teas.

Mr Vickland is an engineer for Ford Motor Co. They have two daughters and two sons. Eddie is a senior at North Farmington High School, where Lynn is a junior. Carol is in ninth grade at Warner Junior High and Steve is a seventh grader at Warner.

Mrs. Vickland holds no office in her own club, but is state consultant in garden therapy for the Federated Garden Clubs of Michigan, Inc.