

Greenhouse gardening

'Ready, Set, Grow,' says gardener

BY MARGE ALPERN
Get Ready!
Get Set!
Grow!

The greenhouse is alive with a sudden burst of growth. Begonias, azaleas, bougainvillea, geraniums, petunias, phalaenopsis and phalaenopsis orchids are all in full and brilliant bloom. These are the darlings of the greenhouse owner.

Now we know that even the plants we feared were dead since last November were really only "sleeping," and the warm sun and longer days have awakened them. Everything in the greenhouse has come alive and is clamoring for more attention, more frequent watering and more generous feedings.

THESE ARE busy days as the welcome sun brings out its merriment, but if you're not cautious, it can turn into "black magic" and scald tender foliage, dry up tiny buds and decimate roots and root hairs.

Some shading is necessary in a south, southwest, southeast or western exposure that catches long hours of afternoon sun. Roll up shades or other protection should be mounted by the first week in April. Meanwhile, a roll of cheese cloth handy to drape over sensitive plants that may be overexposed.

Because most light enters the greenhouse through the glass roof or glass structure and not through side windows, as in our homes, plants placed on high shelves receive considerably more light than plants placed on or near the floor of the greenhouse. The sun loving petunias and geraniums can be kept close to the upper glass windows or can cascade down from high flying baskets.

But as the sun becomes stronger, other plants which have up until now prospered in the higher, more exposed locations may have to be brought down.

I HAVE BEEN growing several pots of Streptocarpus rexii, a beautiful relative of the African violet, on some upper shelves. They are green, full and beginning to bud, but they would have burned and stopped blooming as the sun became brighter if I hadn't moved

them down to the floor among the ferns.

In this new environment of reduced light intensity and higher humidity they are flaunting several long stemmed pink, red and blue trumpets.

Streptocarpus makes a very successful house plant, and it is especially desirable because its flowers pendulous from the stem until wet weather. It is easily divided at the base and grows rapidly once rooted. Watch out for mealy bugs — they also find it very attractive.

THE HIGHER LIGHT intensity of the early spring sun means higher temperatures, and heat builds up very rapidly in the greenhouse. Set the automatics to open at 75 degrees on a sunny day and let the fresh air pour in. This automatic device is a real boon to the greenhouse owner as it works without constant supervision.

No wonder in the days of manually operated vents the greenhouse was called a "hot-house," for that's exactly what it was. If no one was around to open the vents, the greenhouse became a pressure cooker.

Circulate the fresh incoming air with a strategically placed oscillating fan. Since we are trying to duplicate conditions as found in nature, keep the fan operating 24 hours a day. Never a fan doesn't turn off at 6 p.m., and continual air movement assures a dry leaf surface at all times. This is especially important at night when the chance of viral or fungal infection is greatest.

A LARGE CEILING fan in my greenhouse lends a rather exotic touch reminiscent of an Art Deco conservatory of a setting for a novel by Ernest Hemingway.

Charles Blanca fan does a great job of keeping the temperature too high and it also keeps the atmosphere humid and airy without harshly buffeting any tender ferns.

Sun, air and finally humidity, these are the three environmental factors requiring greater attention at this time of year. As the temperature rises, the moisture in the air drops. Most plants can endure in fact, enjoy, the higher day time

temperature so long as the surrounding humidity is adequate. Try to maintain it between 40-60 percent especially on sunny days.

If you do not have a humidifier, prop up your hose with misting head attached so that the fine spray stays on the droplets will collect on the floor and evaporate back up into the air.

No doubt about it, spring is the busiest time in the greenhouse, but it also provides the ideal time for repotting, taking cuttings and experimenting. Replant into larger pots all the plants you want to develop into large specimen plants.

During this period of rapid growth they will readily withstand the trauma of the operation and will quickly reestablish a vigorous new root system.

WHEN YOU KNOCK, the root ball out of the old pot, take a clean sharp knife and cut off an inch or two of the root mass. Instead of injuring the plant, you actually are stimulating it. Set it in fresh soil in a pot one size larger and add a small amount of Osmocote, which is

a slow release fertilizer. If you don't want the plant to grow any larger, don't transplant it; just scoop out the top two or three inches of soil and replace it with fresh soil and just a bit of Osmocote for a spring tonic.

If you have carried over any of last summer's fibrous begonias, take a few of the young basal sprouts that already have developed an incipient root system and start a new plant.

Young plants produce many more new blooms than last year's old ones and after a few pinches you'll again have a large plant. Tip cuttings from geraniums, impatiens and many other plants root and grow quickly, but it is the basal growth of fibrous begonias that make the best cuttings.

The large double pink begonia with a few sprays of white elocine ivy draped over the edge creates a beautiful basket for either the summer terrace or greenhouse.

There's a great deal to do and it is very exciting, but don't be too

rushed, or so ambitious that the greenhouse becomes a burden or a bore.

The real joy of all gardening is

10 honored

Ten Farmington area residents who attend Madonna College in Livonia have been named to the dean's list.

Diane M. Beers, Barbara A. Scherer and Patricia C. Appel, all had 4.0 or perfect grade points.

Others listed were Joanne P. Weiss, Donna C. Mashauer, Janice T. Saddington, Debbie A. Jonna, Diane M. Hoerner and Mary P. Sheerer and Joann R. Jenkins.

Phi Beta Kappa

Phi Beta Kappa honors were conferred on Karma Lochrie, 34105 State, Farmington. Ms. Lochrie is a student at DePauw University, Indiana.

Ms. Lochrie is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Lochrie, Jr., of Farmington. She is a 1973 graduate of Pike High School, Indianapolis, Ind. She is majoring in English at DePauw.

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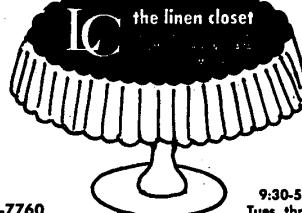
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