

Suburban Gardener

Mother-In-Law Plant Comes From Tropics

By BETTY FRANKEL Mrs. Edwin Braun's handsome Dieffenbachia plant adds a dramatic touch to the living room in her Farmington Township home.

These tropical plants, which are tolerant of the dry atmosphere and subdued light in the average home, are easy to grow. However, the specimens raised by Ellen and Ed Braun are especially healthy and attractive.

Mrs. Braun claims that her care consists only of dusting the exotic green and white leaves. Propagating, feeding and watering are done by her husband.

Dieffenbachias are popularly known as "dumb cane" because the juice of the plant has a numbing effect on the tongue. Braun says they are also known as "mother-in-law plant" and that natives of South America and the West Indies are reputed to feed some of the toxic juice to their spouse's mother—then she can't talk!

The Brauns haven't tested this, but have noted that droplets of liquid which sometimes drip from the tips of the leaves tend to mar the varnish finish on furniture.

THE BRAUNS began raising Dieffenbachias several years ago when a friend who was moving to California gave them a cutting from her plant. This leafy stalk was rooted in a container of water. It seemed to take a long time for the roots to form, but when it was well rooted it was planted in a pot of Michigan peat humus.

It grew well in the peat, developing a sturdy stem and many large rich green leaves. Unlike most Dieffenbachia plants, which tend to become bare and lanky looking with a small tuft of leaves atop a stalk, the Brauns' plant

has remained well clothed with leaves.

Soon it reached the ceiling, and Ed Braun began making cuttings from his plant. He now has several handsome Dieffenbachia plants in his home and has given away over a dozen plants.

HE HAS experimented with various methods of propagation. In addition to rooting the cut-off top of the plant, complete with leaves and growing tip, he has also rooted sections of stems.

The best system, he has found, is to cut a stem into sections about three or four inches in length, each including a node or place where a leaf had been attached.

These sections are left exposed to the air for a few days until the cut ends have become dry. They are then laid horizontally in a container of Michigan peat and pressed in so that half the piece is buried in the peat and the top half is exposed.

The peat is kept fairly moist, but not too wet or the stem sections will rot. The bud will soon enlarge and start growing into a shoot and roots will form at its base.

Braun finds that the horizontally placed sections root far better than those placed upright. Coarse sand can also be used as a rooting medium.

THE BRAUNS PLANT their Dieffenbachias in saucerkut



MRS. EDWIN BRAUN and her Dieffenbachia. (Evert photo)

cracks, which are available from a local hardware store in a variety of sizes. These large plants need large pots and the plain off-white crocks are handsome containers, compatible with either contemporary or traditional decor.

They have also used plastic wastebaskets as plant containers. Some brown simulated wood ones are inexpensive but very attractive.

A layer of broken crockery or pebbles is put in the bottom of the container for drainage, and then the rooted Dieffenbachia is planted in the Michigan peat.

The plants are fed every few months with a water soluble plant food.

THEY ARE PLACED where they get indirect light, but are not kept in a bright sunny window.

There are many varieties of Dieffenbachia available. One horticulture book lists over 50 kinds. In addition to their

handsome large-leaf variety marked with a white herringbone pattern, the Brauns also have some miniature forms with tiny leaves. Other popular varieties include some with mottled and feathered leaves and with irregular blotches.

There are also varieties with black-green leaves, pale chartreuse leaves, and golden yellow leaves.

Paneling In Foyer

If your children continually nick and smudge the walls in your foyer, consider a washable paneling that will withstand such abuse.

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The Green Thumb By GEORGE ABRAHAM

Rooting shrubs indoors: Many home gardeners are using the windowsill for a green thumb to root cuttings of their woody plants, both evergreen and non-evergreens. A windowsill greenhouse can be made simply by using a plastic freezer bag filled with sand-peat moss, or vermiculite. Freezer bags are ideal for starting many popular ornamentals such as Chinese evergreen, ivies, philodendrons, plus many other foliage plants. Try your hand at rooting the "hard" or woody stems such as lilacs, forsythia, privet, roses and many others found around the home. Some gardeners have told us they have good luck rooting evergreens and yews.

Handyman

Q. We have taken the ceramic tile off our bathroom walls, but we can't seem to remove the tile cement. Is there any way to get this off?

A. It is almost impossible to remove this without damaging the plaster. You will have to have the wall replastered or cover it with wall paneling.

Q. Someone spilled tea on my marble table, and it has left a stain. How can I take it out?

A. You can bleach out the stain with hydrogen peroxide (hair bleach) which has a drop or two of ammonia has been added.

Q. There are rust marks on the white trim around the outside of our house.

A. The rust marks are caused by nailheads which have not been recessed into the wood. Buy a nail set and eighth inch below the surface, then fill the holes with putty. Wash the wood solution of trisodium phosphate to remove dirt and stains, and then repaint.

Q. We have an old photograph that is badly faded. Is there any way we can have it strengthened again?

A. If it's a black-and-white picture, you can have it copied, and strengthened in the process. Your photo dealer can handle this for you. If it's a color photo, there isn't any way you can restore the original colors after they have faded.

Remember that apples are alive and they "breathe." The warmer the room the faster they breathe, or the short the apples' life span. Keep the apples in a plastic bag in the refrigerator and they'll keep fresher.

GREEN THUMB CLINIC: A reader writes: "We want to grow a better tomato this year. Last year the crop did not ripen. Is there anything we can do to hasten ripening?"

ANSWER: I'd use an early variety such as Fireball, or New Yorker, or some other early type. Try starting your own plants, using peat pots or the Jiffy pellets. Sow seed directly into the pots about March 15 and they'll be in good shape for setting directly into the garden when warm weather comes.

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