

Now's the time to get ready for gardening

The seed catalogues that have been finding their way into your mailbox are your cue to think spring. In spite of the view from your window. Many of the lawn and garden activities suggested by Michigan State University Extension specialists have a spring flavor, too:

- Plan your 1982 vegetable and flower gardens and landscape plantings. Order seeds and plants early so you'll be sure to have them when you want and need them.
- Cut branches from forsythia, quince, birch, pussy willow and other early flowering shrubs, bring them indoors and force them into bloom. Make cuttings with a sharp knife or pruning tool so you don't injure the plants. Place cut branches in a bucket of water in a cool (50 degrees), bright spot. Mist flowers

several times a day as they start to open. Keep the cut ends of the branches in water at all times. To extend the blooming period, provide very cool temperatures at night — 40 degrees, if possible.

- Bulbs potted in October can be brought out of cold storage for forcing now.
- Check winter mulches on perennials and spring bulbs and add to them as needed.
- Inspect winter landscape plant protectors. Repair or replace any that are no longer shielding plants against gnawing rodents, heavy loads of snow and ice, flying salt spray, or drying sun and wind.
- Prune fruit trees, grapes, wisteria and other ornamental trees and shrubs except for spring flowering plants, birch, dogwood and

maple. Spring flowering trees and shrubs beat this year's flowers on last year's wood, so pruning now would prevent flowering. Birches, dogwood and maples will bleed sap from untreated wounds made now. Though this does not harm the trees, it does not improve their appearance. Hold off pruning these until summer.

- Check valuable trees and shrubs for silver-gray, foamy-looking tent caterpillar egg masses and bagworm cases. Tent caterpillar eggs will be found encircling small branches. Removing these and the bagworm cases, which also contain egg, will help reduce the number of destructive pests you'll have to deal with this year.
- Take lawn and garden equipment that needs overhauling to the shop now, before the

spring rush starts. If you do your own maintenance, remember never run gasoline engines in closed garages or other poorly ventilated places.

- If you've been feeding wild birds, keep at it. By now they've come to depend on you for their food and will probably starve if you suddenly stop feeding.
- Continue to check produce, bulbs and other plants materials in storage. Use or discard any showing signs of spoilage.
- Water houseplants sparingly. Unless they're receiving plenty of supplemental light, they're probably not growing much and don't need a lot of water. They can also probably do without fertilizing until growth resumes in the spring.

Ma Bell predicts regular rate hikes

Michigan Bell told state lawmakers that inflation and competition are the chief reasons the telephone company needs increases in local rates during the next several years.

"Competition doesn't always produce lower prices," said William C. Ferguson, Michigan Bell executive vice-president and chief operating officer. He was testifying before the House Public Utilities Committee chaired by Rep. John Maynard, D-St. Clair, Shores.

Upward pressure on local phone rates, he said, began long before the landmark consent decree agreed to Jan. 8 by the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. and the U.S. Justice Department. The decree calls for the 22 Bell operating telephone companies, including Michigan Bell, to be spun off from the Bell System.

"The consent decree produces almost no change in the impact we see on (rates for) local service," Ferguson said.

WITH OR without the decree, he said, Michigan Bell sees a need for monthly local service rates to go up about \$9 during the next five years.

In the 1970s, he said, public policy — as expressed by the Federal Communications Commission and in court decisions — was to introduce more competition into the communications industry.

During those years, Michigan Bell President David K. Eastick and other officials, in various forums, attempted to stimulate a "public debate" on the competition issue — an issue Ferguson said few persons knew existed.

"The point we had a difficult time making was that competition doesn't always produce lower prices," he said. Competition drives prices close to cost — meaning that underpriced local service will have to go up while long-distance rates will stay about the same or even go down.

A LOCAL RATE structure with prices covering costs is among the "four essential ingredients" Ferguson said are necessary for Michigan Bell to operate successfully apart from the Bell System.

Others are:

- Reasonably priced access charges, the fees AT&T and other long-distance carriers will pay Michigan Bell to hook into the local network.

These charges are intended to replace the "subsidy" local rates have received from long-distance revenues.

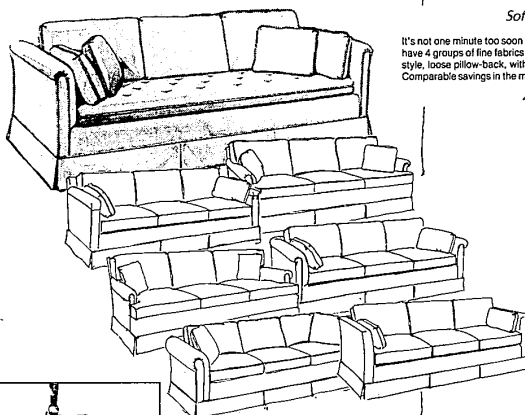
- Depreciation rates which reflect the shorter lives of communications technology. "We must be able to recover the capital costs of our plant just as swiftly as others in the communications business."
- Usage sensitive pricing, or measured service. "Our future growth is in the volume of messages and data we will carry. We need a pricing system that is geared to usage. And so do our customers."



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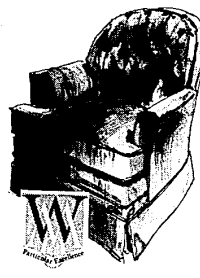
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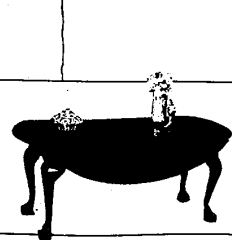
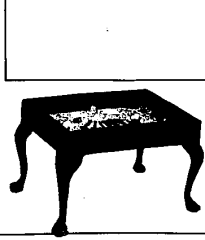
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