

Nurseries make ready for season

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(FNA)

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for sunny weekends."

It's also the lull before the mercantile storm at Farmer John's Greenhouse on Haggerty Road where owner Richard Zoner has one acre, about 44,000 square feet, under glass.

"We're busy preparation-wise," he said. "It's busy, but not confusing. May is really hectic, but April is just a nice, busy month. You don't have to work until 12 o'clock if you don't want to."

Describing his business, Zoner said, "We deal with the garden, flower or vegetable plants . . . If it's too big to fit into a customer's car, we probably don't handle it."

"Like most nurserymen, Zoner lives and dies with the springtime weather, especially the weekend weather."

"Last year my profit margin was down by about a fourth compared to the year before due to eight rainy weekends," he said. "I think we all live

AT THE SPRINGBROOK Garden Center on Power Road, Rick Hatfield is living for May 20 — Flower Day — at Detroit's Eastern Market where he'll rent space.

"We're trying to beat the clock and get the stock ready for Eastern Market," said Hatfield, who runs the establishment with his brother Michael. The Hatfields have more than 8,000 annuals in six greenhouses.

"We're a small operation . . . a family operation," Rick Hatfield said. "I could show you a nursery in Belleville which grows 100,000 geraniums."

The Hatfields had a good Easter ("We sold out of lilacs and mums," Rick said), and are looking forward to the Eastern Market show. They'll rent a stall there every day, arriving at 6 a.m. to sell to dealers and the public.

The run on the geraniums, impatiens, marigolds and other annuals begins about the middle of May.

Rick Hatfield's biggest worry? "The weather," he said. "Last year, the weather wasn't good — too wet and damp. A lot of people lost what they planted, and a lot of them were reluctant to replant."

Summing up the life of a nurseryman, Hatfield said, "It's like farming. We worry about the weather and getting the crops in on time."

ACTIVITY HAS picked up at Frank's Nursery on Grand River, according to manager Mike Martis.

"Mainly, we're dealing with the customers, trying to answer all their questions on pruning, how to plant the trees, and all the preparing the garden," Martis said.

He's also helping unload "three to five" semis a day. "Yesterday, we received more than 3,000 plants."

Martis agreed with Sharon Steinkopf about planting shrubbery now. "It's the best planting time," he said, "not too warm or too cold."

Early-bird vegetable gardeners "are looking for 40-percent off on seeds, which we've already had three ads on," according to Martis.

"Some cold-crop vegetables like cabbage, broccoli and peppers are available now," he added. "Other vegetable flats will be available Mother's Day." Frank's is part of a chain with more than 30 outlets in metropolitan Detroit. Martis has worked at several of them.

"The Farmington and Birmingham stores are the most difficult," he said. "The customers there are more demanding. Frank's is a self-serve store, but some of the customers want you to take them by the hand and pick out all the good stuff. They give you a list and let you pick out the merchandise yourself."

NURSERY EMPLOYEES can count on putting in some long hours during the spring planting season. Steinkopf's, for example, will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. "I'll be available at all hours because we live at the nursery," Steinkopf said.

Because of the great rush, most nurseries increase their staff about now. Frank's in Farmington normally employs 12 fulltime people, including management. But the ranks swell to about 30 during the season.

Most nurseries complement their stock of living things with fertilizers, lawn care, tools, gloves, wheelbarrows and the like. Some, like Frank's, are open the year around. Others close after the Christmas-tree season.

"We do well right into November if it's a mild month," Steinkopf said, "and then we get ready for the Christmas trees. Then we close until late March or early April."

Test your soil

By Mattie Greene
staff writer

Nurseries are stocking up on plants, fertilizers and sprays all with the home gardener in mind. But before running out and buying plants and seeds, there is one step the home gardener should take.

The soil should be tested, according to Greg Patchan, horticulture agent for the Michigan State University Extension Service in Oakland County.

The extension offers a soil-testing service, but is swamped with orders at this time of year. Kits for testing soil are available at area stores and nurseries. They vary in price and Patchan said the more expensive kits tend to give the more accurate results.

KITS ARE ALSO available at the extension office, 1200 N. Telegraph, Postage in the North Building. They can be returned by mail. The fee is \$5, or \$5.50 if the sample has to be returned by mail. During the peak season it may take as long as two weeks to get the results back.

Included with the test results will be tips on soil preparation. Gardeners should write down what they intend to plant and mail it along with the soil sample.

By testing the soil, Patchan said, the gardener will have the best chance of

producing a good crop. Also the gardener should make sure it's the appropriate season for planting a particular vegetable or flower.

For example, now is an appropriate time for strawberries, peas, trees and shrubs, but not a good time for tomatoes.

Patchan warned against using lime on the soil without a test indicating its need. "Most soil in the area is already alkaline," he said. "There is a tendency to add lime in some parts of the country, but here it might do more harm than good."

A GARDENER should not attempt to cultivate wet soil. Patchan said the soil is dry enough if it crumbles when rolled between the fingers. He also said working wet soil breaks down the structure and makes the soil less productive for plant growth.

The best weed control is mulch, according to Patchan. Mulch can be straw, wood chips or grass clippings. Some people use newspapers or plastics to line the rows between plants. Patchan doesn't favor plastic, recommending instead a new synthetic cloth which allows moisture and oxygen to reach the plant.

The extension's gardening hotline is 518-0901. It operates from 9 a.m. until noon and 1-4 p.m. Monday through Friday.



PHOTO BY RANDY GORST

Tim McKinney places bedding plants into plastic containers at Springbrook Nursery in Farmington.



Sharon Steinkopf prepares for the planting season at the Farmington Hills nursery that bears her name.

memory lane

Memories, memories . . . have we got the memories. And we'd like to share them with you. Using local newspaper files, we're dishing up generous slices of life in the Farmington community from 40, 30, 20 and 10 years ago.

APRIL 27, 1944 —
VALEDICTORIAN OF THE class of 1944 at Farmington High School was Shirley Johnson, according to a school announcement. Dorothy Gustafson was salutatorian. Also included in the academic top 10 for the class of 1944 were Annaliese Foster, Carl Hanson, Nancy Fawcett, Betty Aschenbrenner, Zona Libstaff, Edith Kargetta, Audrey Lathrup and Kathleen Tassie.

"**HUMAN INTEREST** still lives with our dog friends," said an item in the Around the Block column, "and that was proved by the tremendous popularity of the movie 'Lassie Come Home' which played at the Civic Theatre this week. It broke all box-office records, according to manager McConnell, and at times it was necessary to refuse to sell any tickets until patrons who had already entered the theatre had seen the show through. To think that this should come to Farmington!! Just a preview of what we may expect in the future."

"**EXCITEMENT IS RUNNING** high among the seniors at F.H.S. for they'll be out in their best bib and tucker Friday night, for it's the senior prom," said another Around the Block item. "Do you remember may back when — but we'll not go into that."

FARMINGTON HIGH lost a track dual meet to Wayne, 66-38, but . . . a surprise was in store for the fans when Oscar Aulen streaked across the finish line to win first in the mile run," according to a newspaper account. "This is the first time he has made any points."

APRIL 29, 1954 —
THE FARMINGTON Township Board offered the community room of the Clarenceville Fire Hall to the Oakland County Sheriff's Department for the purpose of "testing drivers' licenses for township residents. Sheriff Clare Hobbie had requested the use of the hall, located on Wheeler Street east of Middlebelt, one day a week.

FIVE NEW TEACHERS were added to the Farmington School District staff, according to an announcement by Superintendent O.E. Dunckel. Elementary teachers to start next fall included Betty Horsch, Edith J. Powers and Mable M. Lachman. A husband and wife, William and Dorothy Fench, were hired as vocal-music teachers in the secondary schools.

"**HONEST INJUN**," read an advertisement for Dancer's Department Store in downtown Farmington. "Squaw Fashions (are) without reservation — the brightest new lights in Dancer's store! You'll wow the braves in our squaw casuals, all yours for mighty little wampum." Cotton broadcloth "squaw skirts" were offered for \$3.99, and blouses for \$1.19 to \$3.95.

SHORT ITEM: "One reason so many children are seen on the streets at night is that they are afraid to stay home alone."

APRIL 30, 1964 —
THE CORNERSTONE of the new Boisfort General Hospital in Farmington Hills was set in place April 25 with Sen. Phillip Hart on hand to take part in the ceremonies. Hart and the daughter of the hospital's medical director, Dr. Allen Zieger, were photographed at the laying of the cornerstone. The hospital was scheduled to be completed early in 1965.

THE COMBINED equalized valuation for Farmington city and township as set by the county equalization board totaled \$113,371,501, which is an increase of more than \$9 million over the equalization of last year.

THE FARMINGTON Township Board approved plans to pave 11 Mile Road, between Orchard Lake and Middlebelt roads, under a matching-funds program with Oakland County. Approval came during the board's April 27 meeting.

APRIL 25, 1964 —
ROBERT G. CHEESLEY, a leader in business and community activities in Farmington for 18 years, suffered a fatal heart attack April 20. He was 45. President of Chesley Industries, a subsidiary of Pet Inc., Cheesley spent most of his spare time working with the youth of the community through the Farmington YMCA.

PAVING THE MUDDY stretch of Gill Road, which leads to Power Junior High and Gill Elementary schools, was declared a public necessity by a 5-1 vote of the Farmington Hills City Council during a recent meeting. Councilman William Ortmann was the lone dissenter on the paving issue. The cost and the method of financing have yet to be determined.

MICHIGAN MOTORISTS were advised that vehicle inspection teams from the state police and about 40 other agencies are preparing to begin the 1974 random-check-lane programs. Items to be checked included tires, brakes, lights, steering, turn signals, horn, exhaust system, windshield wipers and washers, glass areas and driver and car credentials. In 1973, state police checked 802,897 cars.

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