

Visit to rare plant nursery is worth the trip

BY MARTY FIGLEY
STAFF WRITER

Never on Sunday, so says the sign to the entrance of the Saguaro Rare Plant Nursery, 470 W. Five Mile, Whitmore Lake.

Visitors are welcomed other days of the week, 1 p.m. to dusk Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April through October. Call (313) 449-4237.

This unusual enterprise is a little out of the way, but the trip is well worth it. Take I-96 west to 23, then south on 23 to Exit 50 (Six Mile) to a stop sign. Turn right, then proceed to another stop about 100 yards away. Turn left on Whitmore Lake Road and proceed two-thirds of a mile to Five Mile. To the right is a Baptist church. Watch for the Saguaro sign. Turn right on Five Mile, which is a county lane with an allee of trees. It dead ends into the nursery.

This nursery has grown as quickly as the plants it sells. Richard and Raven Tuttle began the business in 1974 and operated out of a store front. They received positive publicity and the rest is history.

The present location is still growing and the Tuttle's plant to double in size this year. They specialize in desert plants (cacti and succulents), carnivorous plants, water lilies and other pond and pool plants, rain forest specimens (bromeliads, orchids) and many tropical plants. They are still known for

their exotic array of indoor plants and give instructions for their care. For instance, they let cacti go dormant in the wintertime.

"That's a real essential thing, a cool sunny window sill with a south or west exposure (east is OK) is best," Richard Tuttle said.

"Don't overwater, especially in November, December and January. The smaller plants (eight inches) may need water three times then, but larger ones (12 inches in circumference) may need none at all. Resume watering in early February and put them in a sunny spot so they'll start to come out of their dormancy. Slowly pick up the watering. In summer they can dry out in two hot days so must be watched, especially if they're outdoors. It is virtually impossible to overwater when they're outside in the sun. Use a well-drained soil mix."

Variety

One greenhouse contained the cacti, which were overflowing beyond the doors. Succulent wreaths are the specialty of the business. Many varieties of ferns (Richard has a master's degree in botany studying ferns from the University of Michigan), an array of jade plants — some with leaves curled together — a silver dollar jade with light green leaves with maroon edges, Irish Rose — which looks like a house leek from the Alps (where hens and chicks,



MARTY FIGLEY

Unusual enterprise: Raven and Richard Tuttle sell many unusual and rare plants.

Crassula, originated), Ice Plant with yellow blooms and much more. These are available now from stock plants they propagate as well as the hundreds of dish gardens they create.

The most expensive plant is a \$450 Ponytail palm about 30 years old that can summer outside and be kept in-

doors in the wintertime. It is slow growing and is a native of the Sonoran Desert.

"It is probably the sturdiest plant you can grow indoors."

Other plants with unusual forms catch the eye and would make interesting additions to a collection.

Their perennial business is expanding.

"We didn't want to do just ANY perennials, rock garden plants and alpine have the same appeal as succulents which is what we started with."

Alpine highs

Alpines seem to fit the niche. The shapes are more compact, more gem-like; they're more miniature; and they think it's fun to work with them and have been doing so for the past 3-1/2 years.

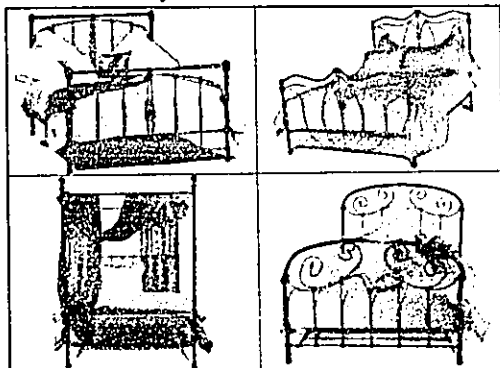
As we strolled through the extensive display gardens I was struck by the unusual variations in shapes and colors of these alpine. Lewisias and others are grown from seed. Raven spotted a lewisia in bloom and was excited as though it was the first time she had experienced it. Their enthusiasm is contagious!

"Lewisias are one of the neatest rock garden plants, named after Lewis and Clark who found it."

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