

APPLIANCE DOCTOR



JOE GAGNON

Consumers want energy efficient appliances

I have written many articles and spoken many times about the shopping habits of Americans when it comes to major home appliances. It was only a year ago when you read about the projected cost of a new washing machine reaching \$800 plus. It's beginning to happen, and with the new technology will come even higher prices.

The \$289 washer will soon become a thing of the past, and those who will benefit from this happening are the service technicians who repair them. At least for a while, many homeowners will opt to have their appliances fixed rather than shopping for a current, expensive model.

Paying the lowest possible price has always been the norm for the majority of consumers, but there's a story from *Appliance Magazine* that shows a new trend. Consumers now rank energy efficiency as the most important factor in shopping for new home appliances, according to a study by Madison, Wis. based Primem, an energy market-intelligence company.

In its study *Attitudes and Behaviors of Residential Consumers about Energy Efficiency*, Primem asked 500 households about factors affecting home appliance purchases and knowledge of energy issues. Consumers in four U.S. geographic regions and California were asked to rank the impact of purchasing decisions on the following factors — fuel choice (natural gas/electricity), price, energy efficiency, brand name, product features, availability and appearance.

The key finding indicates energy efficiency has replaced price as the top appliance purchasing consideration in the U.S. A majority of U.S. households now plan to make an extra effort to buy energy-efficient appliances in the future according to the study.

Three-fourths of consumers said energy efficiency was a very important factor in purchasing appliances during the past year. About 84 percent said they anticipate that energy efficiency will be a very important consideration in making future purchasing decisions.

The survey also showed that consumer attitudes have been shaped by campaigns aimed at raising awareness of energy efficiency such as the U.S. Energy Star labeling program.

Nearly 55 percent of consumers report they have seen efficiency-related advertising. Roughly one-quarter of the respondents said they would be willing to pay more (16 to 25 percent above the standard) price for higher efficiency appliances. It is the opinion of this lonely voice that this new trend toward energy efficiency will equate to the original shopping habit of price being most important. I hope to see one day the trend move to the most important area that so many of us desire when buying an appliance and that is quality.

Ask any service technician what they think about the components and structure of modern appliances and the life span they command today and you are liable to get a response on how they should be made and how it used to be.

Here are some things to consider when shopping for home appliances:

- Call independent service companies that repair appliances and ask what they think is the best brand. Ask what brand has the least amount of repairs.

- Simple is best. The less gadgets you have, the less there is to break down.

Joe Gagnon can be heard Saturday and Sunday on 760 WJR. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals.

Got a question for the Appliance Doctor? Call him at (313) 873-9789, or write to him in care of Keely Kaleski Wygonik, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.



Pretty purple: The African Violet Society is ready to host its upcoming show this month where the easy-to-grow plants will be for sale.

AFRICAN VIOLET CARE

African Violets are easy to grow. They need good, bright light and regular feedings and can bloom year-round.

- Light** Insufficient light is one of the major reasons violets won't bloom. They must have 10 to 14 (no more than 16) hours of bright light per day, but not direct sun. If adequate natural light isn't available, use twin tube fluorescent lights. Make sure leaves are about 10 inches below the tubes. Because violets process nutrients in darkness, they need eight hours of dark per day.

- Temperature** 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal and 60 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit is tolerated for short periods of time.

- Humidity** 40 to 50 percent relative humidity is ideal. Wick watering is ideal because the plant sits on top of a reservoir of water.

- Pots** Use plastic or ceramic pots. Terra cotta pots tend to collect salts, harmful chemicals, and pests. Don't use a pot that's too large. Don't transplant to a larger pot until the roots fill the present pot. Violets tend to bloom most when they are slightly root bound.

- Fertilizer** Lack of fertilizer or too infrequent feeding are among the reasons for lack of blossoms. Peters 12-36-14 is a good source to add to soil. Mix 1/4 teaspoon per gallon of water and use this mixture each time you water. Quadruple the blooms with Nature's Miracle sprinkled over the top of the soil every 10 weeks.

- Water** Never use water through a softener. Keep water room temperature. Keep the violet moist, not wet. Don't allow plant to become completely dry.

- Wick watering** is a good technique. Place a nylon wick on the bottom of the pot with the loose end extending out of the pot about 4 inches. Hang the loose end of the wick in a container of fertilizer/water mixture (see above). Never let the pot touch the water — only the wick should touch the water. This keeps the violet watered for two to four weeks depending on the size of the reservoir.

- Bolt** Violets need light, airy soil that won't pack hard and allows for easy root

Please see VIOLET, C2

IN bloom

Flower societies host violet and orchid shows

By LANA MINT
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Twenty years ago Ingrid Bowman received a purple African Violet from her sister-in-law. For fun back then, she pinched off a few leaves and tried to sprout more plants. She succeeded.

Fast-forward to the year 2002: Bowman, of Waterford, is an active member of the Michigan African Violet Society and her house is filled throughout with the flowering plants in shades of purple, pink and white.

For Bowman's fulfilled lifestyle, violets are the perfect flower because they're grown indoors and are simple to care for by a busy person.

"I'm a big traveler, but I also love plants so these flowers are wonderful for me," Bowman said. "They can be wick watered and left for several weeks at a time."

Low-maintenance flowers that bloom easily are the trend, but for some people time isn't an issue when it comes to growing their favorite blossom. The Michigan Orchid Society flower fans grow the easy and more difficult plants.

Both the African Violet and Orchid societies are hosting shows this month.

Bowman and 20 other violet fans will host the African Violet Spring Display and Sale 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, March 30, and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, March 31, at Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road in Ann Arbor.

HOW TO CARE FOR ORCHIDS

- When to cut the flower spike** when it's "dead" When most orchids finish blooming the spike should be cut off with a sharp, sterile blade as close to the base of the spike as possible. Of all of the more commonly available orchids, only phalaenopsis (the moth orchid) will re-bloom from its old spike. Phalaenopsis will generally re-bloom, given a little extra care.

- The spike should be cut** between the scar left by the first flower and the last node (swollen, jointed area on the stem). One of the lower nodes will then initiate a new spike that will generally produce flowers within eight to 12 weeks. Younger or weaker plants may not re-bloom.

- It is also a good idea** to cut the spike off entirely by midsummer to allow the plant to grow strongly to produce next year's bloom.

- How often should I water?** Once every four to seven days, depending on the dryness of the home. Allow the plants to approach dryness and apply sufficient water so that it drains freely through the container. Never allow the potted plant to sit in its own water.

- Flowering plants may require** more frequent watering to make up for the greater burden of the flowers. Plants will require less water when not in active growth and more while growing.

- Increased frequency of watering** won't make up for a poor root system. If roots are not plump and alive, repotting may be needed.

- Lastly, plants with thinner, softer foliage** require more water than those with harder, more succulent leaves. Plants with pseudobulbs (such as dendrobiums and cattleyas) generally need to dry out more between watering than do those without (such as phalaenopsis).

- Do orchids need to be fertilized** while they are in flower? What fertilizer should I use? Yes, if anything, flowering plants need extra fertilizer. Plants need to be fertilized with a product appropriate to the medium in which they are grown. Plants in a bark-based mix will need a fertilizer high in nitrogen (usually in a 3-1-1 ratio), while a balanced fertilizer will do for all others (usually a 1-1-1 ratio). If in doubt, fertilize with the same balanced fertilizer you use for your other container plants.

- When to repot** When fresh rooting activity is expected (generally in the spring) or is very evident, generally every one or two years. Fresh rooting activity is best shown by the succulent green root tips on plump white roots. Often, the main flush of rooting comes from the base.

Source: http://www.alchoorchid.com/new_page_9.htm

Society will host its Palm Sunday Show 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday, March 23, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, March 24, at Laurel Park Place Mall.

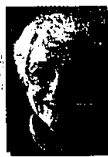
Please see FLOWERS, C2

GARDEN SPOT

Cast your eye toward castor bean

My friend, Tina Dupke's, poem is the perfect introduction to March. She calls it *Winter's Vengeance*:
Winter with full knowledge that her allotted time is spent:
With vengeance must have her final fling, before she will relent.

She swirls her skirts of dark, cold winds and dances through the night, And scatters branches on the ground, in fiendish child delight.
She spills the rain across the sky, then with her frigid glances,
In jealous rage of Spring, the land, she icily enhances.



MARTY FOLEY

Then startled by the morning's sun, she wearies of the game,
And wrapping herself in diamond robes, relinquishes her claim.

A recent week personified this poem with all the snow we had — but wasn't it beautiful! Little by little the weather will become warmer and we'll be out in the garden doing our "thing" until cold weather once again forces us inside.

We can plan our gardens now. Two annuals with large, attractive foliage are Castor Bean and Elephant's Ear. Growing both will be an interesting experience.

While we wait for spring to really arrive, you might want

Please see GARDEN, C2



Interesting plant: The seeds of the easy-to-grow castor bean contain castor oil but the skin of the beans are toxic.