



The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

We've had many letters asking us what causes leaves of house plants to turn brown around the edges and drop. Let's answer this by mentioning a word called humidity — the amount of moisture in the air.

Most house plants do their best when the humidity is about 50 per cent. The proper humidity in the home is from 35 to 40 per cent, although the air indoors often goes as low as 12, which is about eight to 11 per cent lower than the average humidity in the Sahara Desert.

Humidity in a greenhouse is around 60 per cent — which

is why plants do so well in the greenhouse. This explains why plants start to turn brown around the edges soon after being moved from a moist greenhouse to a home. You can increase the humidity by placing plants on a tray of gravel kept constantly moist. Plants grouped together fare better — than those left standing alone in a dry room.

A kitchen or bathroom usually has more humid air than other rooms in the house. Did you know that every time you mop the kitchen floor (one that's 8 by 10 feet) you release about 2½ pounds of water (or 2½ pints) vapor into the air.

House plants constantly give off moisture, good for themselves and for your nose too.

GREEN THUMB CLINIC:
"We have a shady spot where not many flowers can grow. Is there a good plant we can use?"

Answer: Try impatiens. They can tolerate a poor soil and shade. In fact, too rich a soil will cause plants to grow tall and discourage blooming. There's a dwarf "Elfin" impatiens, growing about 10 inches tall, which are free-flowering throughout the entire season.

Start seed in daylight (it is sensitive to darkness) and grow in temperature of 72 degrees or higher, never lower. After seed is up, transplant and grow at 60 to 65 degrees.

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When you think about resilient floor tile you automatically think "square." But why limit your design plans to this one shape?

Cut a tile diagonally and you have two triangles; a row of tile makes a stripe; four will make a diamond, six a rectangle.

With this in mind, get out some graph paper and felt-tipped pens and create your own "custom design" floor. Having a floor quite unlike any other does something to a woman's self-esteem and the satisfaction is even greater when the creation is your very own.

To get you started, Better Floors Council designers suggest the following for a dining room: The highlight will be a border in a strong color, a color chosen from some accessory such as a favorite piece of china.

This border should be a few rows in from the wall for full effectiveness but not so far that it is hidden by the table. The council suggests vinyl asbestos tile (it is greaseproof) in a neutral or pastel for the field tile.

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Good Mulching Job Ends Weed Worries

If you do a good job of mulching, you can enjoy your vacation without worrying about weeds taking over your vegetable garden, advises a Michigan State University horticulturist.

"Mulch provides other benefits as well," says J. Lee Taylor. It conserves soil moisture, prevents soil puddling, keeps fruit clean, helps maintain uniform soil temperatures, and organic mulches gradually release plant nutrients as they decompose.

Consider black plastic for mulching vegetables and flowers, suggests Taylor.

Black plastic is used mainly with plants grown in hills or spaced apart such as melons, squash, pumpkins, cucumbers, tomatoes and strawberries.

It should not be used with cool season crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, or peas unless it is covered with sawdust or other material to reflect light, points out Taylor.

If your garden soil needs improving, organic materials might be better than plastic for mulching. But try to avoid organic materials that

contain a lot of weed seeds, warns the horticulturist.

Apply hay and straw mulches three to four inches deep for best results, recommends Taylor. Two inches of ground corn cobs, sawdust or shavings provide adequate mulching, too.

Mulching materials such as straw, chopped corn cobs and sawdust are often low in nitrogen and may cause nitrogen deficiencies in the soil.

To remedy this, add some nitrogen fertilizer.

If straight nitrogen fertilizers aren't available, apply a pound of complete fertilizer.



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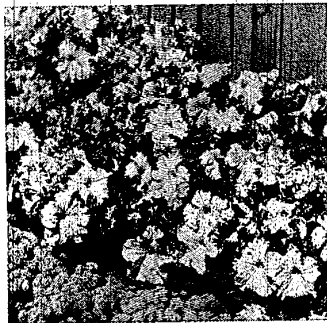
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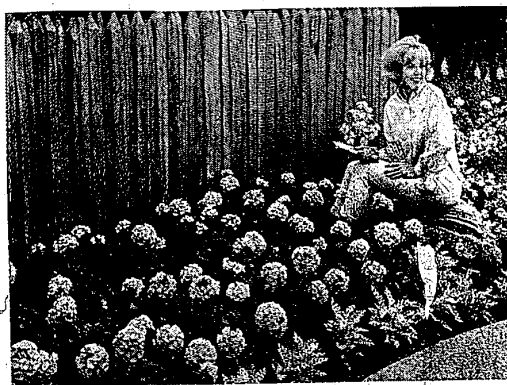
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