

**A traditionally tight
market is getting
some young hopefuls
entering the field**



Fantastic Gardens is right smack dab in the middle of the Orchard Mall.

Small plant shops becoming a growth industry

By JUDITH BERNE

"Ten years ago the most anyone had in the house was an African violet. Nowadays you have to wade through the plants to find a place to sit down," a West Bloomfield housewife said.

In response to this turn toward Mother Nature, scads of hopeful entrepreneurs have opened up area plant stores during the past year.

No longer do indoor plant enthusiasts have to make the trip out to Johnson's Gardens in rural West Bloomfield or journey in to Birmingham's The New Leaf or Pot's & Plants.

Now these more established plant institutions must share the ever-growing market with a plethora of newcomers—most of which have opened within the past year.

FROM NORTHWESTERN Highway to Orchard Lake Road, plant stores—mostly small ones—are sprouting up in the nooks and crannies generally reserved for Milk Depots and teenage boutiques.

Proprietors of the new shops are generally young and optimistic. For some it is a first business and an opportunity to turn an avocation into a money-making operation.

Most are aware of market research which proclaims that the plant market in the midwest will not peak until the early 1980s and then only slowly recede.

All feel the tremendous competition but believe that the high demand for plants will allow room for the most fit to not just survive but flourish.

KENNY MANN, owner of the Plantery on Northwestern Highway in Southfield, is content with his small, personal operation.

"I'm very young. I'm only 22 and I don't need a lot of money to live on," he explained.

"I go out and pick my own plants and price them reasonably," he added.

Mynn said he has been into plants since he was eight years old. Time spent in California, where the plant store business first boomed, made him believe it could also be done in the Detroit area.

HIS DOWN-the-street competition, The Plant Shop, is operated by a wife-husband team, in that order.

Larry Rem followed his wife Judy into the business when her part-time plant business appeared more potentially lucrative than his \$40,000 per year sales position.

According to Rem, his wife started throwing plant parties and "I got tired of plants all over our dining room table."

He told her to find a spot to warehouse her goods—one that she could operate two or three days a week.

Mrs. Rem opened up last October in one small room with an inventory of \$500, as Rem tells it. Since then, they have expanded sideways and above and have increased their inventory to \$35,000.

Rem, now the business manager, said they will take over the other half of their building by fall.

But he has no intention of expanding the plant square footage.

"Our growth from here will be in other directions: pots, gift items—a kind of miniature Pier 1 imports."

THE GARDEN of Eden, on Laher Road in Southfield, reports similar growth.

Leonard Cyrulnik and Richard Roth, both 24, got into the plant business just one year ago and have since opened a second location.

Just out of college, the two combined their love of plants—"We both had houses full of them"—and the indoor gardening fad.

They specialize in floor plants from

their 3,000-square-foot Southfield store, leaving the smaller greenery to others.

Cyrulnik believes that their plant knowledge is as big an asset as their merchandise.

"People go out and spend \$20 on a plant and another \$20 on a pot, they don't want it to die," he stated.

Both go out and measure for light and decorating effect for their customers.

SO DOES Jack Durrwachter of The Plant Hut, located on Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield.

"I make house calls," Durrwachter said. He sometimes makes unexpected visits to his clientele to see how certain plants sold them are doing.

"We don't run a bargain plant store," Durrwachter proudly asserts in a definite appeal to the well-heeled customer. "You don't go to J. L. Hudson and bargain for a price."

Durrwachter is one of few who apprenticed at an area nursery before opening his own place.

He believes that the plant craze of the moment is a definite fad. "But there is also a definite area of solid business in this field," he added.

Like some others, he is expanding his plant container business for the time when "people will decide they

have a correct proportion of plants in their homes."

BUT ALL of the new plant stores have not fared as well.

Greenworks, located in the Pine Lake Mall across Orchard Lake Road from The Plant Hut, opened and closed in a matter of months.

And, Beginnings, which debuted only recently in the Franklin Shopping Center at 14 Mile and Middlebelt, is feeling the pressure of getting established.

Owner Doug Lawrence is the first to acknowledge he has to overcome a poor location where he cannot be seen from the major street. He is further hampered by Farmington Hills' zoning restrictions which do not allow much outdoor display to attract attention.

"This used to be a cleaners," young Lawrence related. "Till a month ago, I still had people bringing me their pants."

"I'll just have to grin and bear it," he continued. "I just didn't want to add myself to Northwestern Highway."

LAWRENCE IS excited by the chance to turn a five-year hobby into a business. He gave up a position with Chrysler to do it. He is hoping that an emphasis on

tropical foliage combined with a graphics artist in residence will give him the leverage he needs to make it. Also, the deliberately non-plant name, beginnings, allows the flexibility to go in other directions.

"My sister is in the Army. I run the plant store," Lawrence laughed. "It's really kind of a trip."

HOW THE newer, smaller operations have affected the established plant institutions was considered by Ted Johnson, founder and owner of the granddaddy of indoor greenery, Johnson Gardens.

They are "a little thorn in the side," acknowledged Johnson, who said the seeds of his operation were planted back in 1930.

Beginning as an outdoor operation, he converted to house plants in the early 1940s and today hosts 15,000 square feet of greenhouse space with 5,000 more to come.

Johnson says newer stores have not cut into his business because the demand for indoor plants has increased so dramatically.

"This is a free country," Johnson declared. "Too many people say the little guy doesn't have a chance. If they have the brains and guts to survive, why, I say more power to them."



Manager Marjorie Royce has a background in the plant business. (Staff photos by Tracy Baker)

New, old faces...

AREA PLANT STORES INCLUDE

- Beginnings
22255 W. 14 Mile
Farmington Hills
- Bordine's Better Blooms
1985 Rochester Road
Rochester
- Fantastic Gardens
Orchard Lake Mall
West Bloomfield
- Franks Nursery
6375 Telegraph
Birmingham
- Franks Nursery & Trims
80 N. Adams
Rochester
- Garden of Eden
23185 Laher
Southfield
- Johnson Gardens
7315 Drake
West Bloomfield
- New Leaf
750 South Woodward
Birmingham
- Pot's & Plants
202 E. Maple
Birmingham
- The Plantery
28800 Northwestern
Southfield
- The Plant Hut
4272 Orchard Lake Road
West Bloomfield
- The Plant Shop
29455 Northwestern
Southfield