

Mum farm

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cause the undergrowth (new shoots) to come up too early during a warm spell then turn brown during a frost.

In fact, explained Kreider, mums often do better with a northern exposure because it prevents them from coming out of their dormant stage too soon and exposing their new shoots to late frosts.

The Kreiders mulch their plants early, usually in June, to preserve the moisture in the soil and to keep the weeds down. The mulch they use, composed of tobacco leaf ribs, sawdust, and peat, also helps to keep insects away from the plants.

300 Varieties

Started as a hobby, growing mums became a business for the Kreiders about 1960 after years of being pressured by local people to expand their flower cultivation and retail the plants.

Now an important part of the farm work - they also raise ducks, chickens, hogs and steers - the over 300 varieties of mums take a lot of care and work, but it's worth it, according to the family.

Utilizing no outside help, Harold and Esther Kreider with their son and daughter work hard and long to keep the farm going but, said Kreider, "We wouldn't be in this business if we didn't like it."

Their daughter, Linda who studied flower arranging at Brownstown Vo-Tech, does all the dried flower arrangements that are sold in the small retail shop adjacent to the house.

Esther Kreider fills the shop with her handicrafts: terrycloth animals, canopy doll beds made from cigar boxes, egg carton creations and "granny punkins," plus potted plants completed and

gourds, they were much larger than the ones grown the previous season. Realizing they had hybridized themselves, Kreider decided to continue the procedure each year so he would always have some of the large gourds for use as fresh flower containers.

The October Flower

The mum farm is a riot of fall color about mid-October when most of the flowers have reached the peak of perfection. That's when the number of visitors to the farm reaches its peak, too.

"On a nice Sunday in October, we have had as many as 1000 visitors," Kreider told us.

We had noticed some signs posted explaining the family's policy of no Sunday sales. We wondered, if the visitors come from every state in the union, as Esther Kreider had told us, did the family run into any problems with people who had come a long way to purchase flowers on Sunday?

"Not often," answered Kreider: "People usually understand. We figure we work hard six days a week and want the seventh as a day of rest."

"Sometimes, they'll lay down the money and tell us to pick it up on Monday," he continued.

"But that's not the way they work, and even if they risk offending some people who refuse to take 'no' for an answer, they intend to continue their policy of 'No Sunday Sales.'"

"We could do a tremendous business on Sunday, but it's not worth it," said Kreider. "After a busy week, it's our only chance to just visit with people. We meet a lot of nice people in this business."

Autumn Show

The Kreiders are now getting ready for their flowers' annual show. It takes place about the same time every year: mid-October.

"Most of our mums bloom

around the 15th," said Kreider and explained there are some varieties that bloom in September but often during heat that takes the color out of them.

Later blooming mums sometimes bloom so late that they are in danger of freezing, he said. That's why they prefer the mid-October blooms at the mum farm.

"We've had some for 20 years (of the same variety) and their blooming time changes by only a week at the most each year," noted Kreider.

They usually tell their customers to plan on coming the weekend closest to the 15th of the month to catch the mums at their brightest.

"When we see the expressions on people's faces as they look at the displays, it's all worth it," Kreider said, and he spoke for the rest of his family as well.

The mum farm is open from dawn to dusk every day except Saturday when it

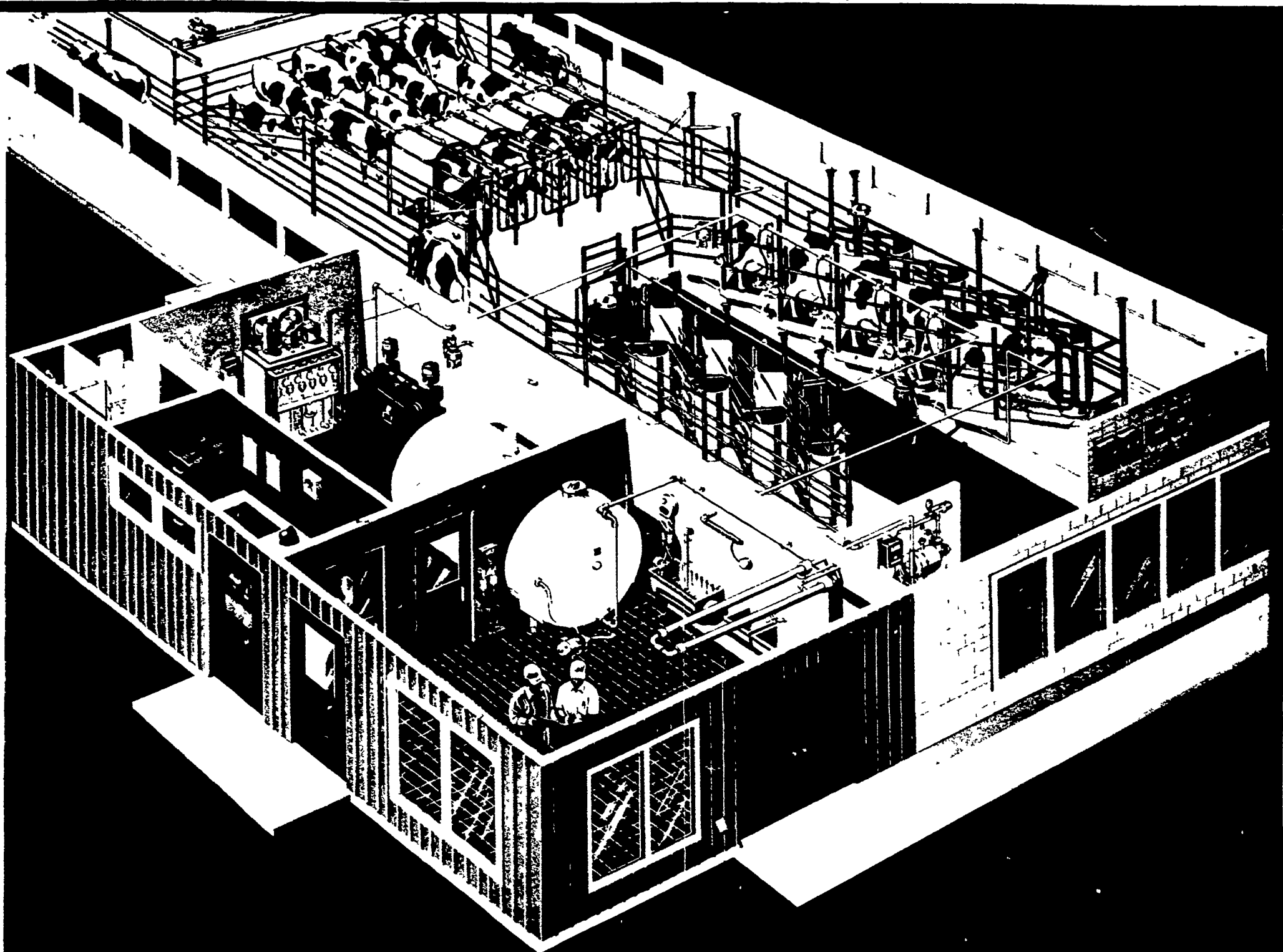
closes to the public at 5 p.m. Visitors are welcomed to come see the Kreiders and their mums on Sundays, too. "No Sunday Sales" . . . just visiting.

Another item offered at the shop is an unusual container for fresh flowers. Made of a large gourd that has been hollowed out and coated with shellac, the gourds are so popular that the Kreiders are hard pressed to produce the 50 to 100 often snapped up by customers in one day. Fresh flowers. Most of her hand-made items are over the winter when the farm, chores aren't as time-consuming.

Filled with cut flowers, the lovely fall arrangements make welcome gifts for shut-ins or as table decorations.

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