

Greenhouse

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but Jim said, "In October, November and December, I used 1700 gallons of oil. In January, I used 2300 gallons. It's much more than I expected."

To conserve as much as possible, Jim spent 90 hours installing plastic material over the glass roof. He explained that the greenhouse needed paint and caulking, but he chose to use the plastic which is designed to last two years. He said it is specially treated for use on a greenhouse so it won't yellow, and it is stronger than plastic used on homes for insulation. He said further that the plastic gives a dead air space which helps with insulation.

Financing such an operation is no small matter. The cost of the roof and materials was \$200, which came out of a fund of \$500 that he had saved to start the business. He was able to save some money from a lawn-business he maintains in which he cares for 12 lawns during the summer. He also grew about an acre of vegetables which he sold at Root's.

He said he was able to defer payment on the poinsettias, which meant he could sell them first. He has established credit with local greenhouses, enabling him to continue to expand and grow.

Jim is quick to express his appreciation to local greenhouse owners who have been helpful to him, giving advice as he got started. He specifically mentioned Arthur Miller of Miller's Greenhouses, Landisville; Charles Ruhl of Ruhl's Flowers in Mount Joy; Ray Lefever of Lefever's Flowers, Lancaster; and Ruth Nolt of Landisville.

He adds that a big source of information and support is his course at Mount Joy Vo-Tech and floriculture teacher Dan Helwig.

But, he said, "I learned a lot from experience." He said, "One of my biggest mistakes was with my

kalanchoes. I bought 200 for \$100 and fertilized them and burned the roots off." So now he has tiny plants with pretty blooms and he just hopes they will grow out and save his investment.

Another problem he had was with ventilation in the Fall which caused some of his plants to be burned from being too hot. Another serious problem developed when he sprayed some plants for aphids during the sunny day when he should have done it at night or on a cloudy day. This cost him some trouble with the leaves on otherwise beautiful plants.

Jim is philosophical about these problems, however, and says that he feels he has learned more in his own greenhouse than he would have had he worked for someone else. And he says, "I never had any serious problems."

Operating a greenhouse involves a lot of record keeping. Jim says, "I keep all my bills and record everything that I sell at market." He also said that the distributive education teacher at Mount Joy Vo-Tech is going to work with him in setting up a complete bookkeeping system.

Jim is also learning the pricing of plants for selling. He said he establishes a price which will "get my money back, with very little profit." He figures the cost of fuel oil, supplies, and a little labor.

Dan Kewig, Jim's floriculture teacher, says that Jim's outstanding work in his greenhouse and vegetable projects helped him win a gold medal for his miscellaneous floriculture project book. Helwig says it's "tough" for someone to go into the greenhouse business, and expressed confidence in the work Jim does. He said, "With his experience and perseverance, he will have a good opportunity to work toward an amangementposition in a greenhouse, or will be in a good position to go into business fulltime for himself."

Jim is president of Plants Unlimited, the FFA chapter at Mount Joy Vo-Tech, a position which he says is helping him become less nervous before a group. He had played football from seventh through eleventh grade, but couldn't go out this year because of the work at the greenhouse. Jim is a member of the youth group at Landisville Church of God.

Jim says he gets a lot of satisfaction from working with plants. Just walking into the greenhouse and seeing growing plants gives him a lot of joy. "I like to look at everything," he remarked.

But he realizes that his current level of business is not profitable enough to support him, so he's unsure of his future. If his Spring and Summer is successful, he says he may try to open an additional house. "I would like to extend my varieties," he explained.

Despite all the hard work and the few setbacks, Jim says, "I would start over again. I really like it, and I've learned a lot."



Jim Wert pots some cuttings from wandering jews. They will all become lush hanging baskets under his expert care.

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