

Pretty plants take more than chance

by LAUREL SCHAEFFER
Berks Co. Reporter

READING, Pa. -- Are you aware that 95 per cent of all house plants don't like direct sunlight, even though it is the main ingredient needed for their growth? If you didn't, you can join the ranks of over 120 farm women and guests who attended the Berks County Farmers Association

Ladies Day Out program held at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel, here, on March 16.

This affair is an annual event for women belonging to the Berks County Farmers Association. The speaker for the morning was Debbie Flay of "Debbie's Plants and Macrame," Reading. Debbie told the group to learn the plants by their families, saying, "It is much easier to

care for them that way." Plants of the same family require the same care, the florist explained.

Debbie also told the group that water is the second most important ingredient to a plant's health, and that 95 per cent all plants die because of over-watering.

"It is better to under-water than to over-water," she noted. "Use a water meter or

your finger to tell when they need it."

"But," she cautioned, "don't just feel the top of the soil—push your finger in to the first knuckle."

As an explanation for her last statement, she said, "The top of the soil is always dry."

She also pointed out that the dishes on the bottom of the plant pots are not reservoirs, so when the water starts to trickle out of the bottom, the plant has had enough.

Debbie then proceeded to discuss, by family, the plants she has on display. The families that like humidity are good for kitchens or bathrooms. Misting is often recommended for these plants.

"I don't feel that misting is always necessary for most plants, but if you do it, don't go overboard." Mistifiers are used to add humidity, they are not a watering method, she cautioned the group.

Debbie pointed out that house plant production has been increasing in the last few years. Spider plants, she remarked, helped to get the plant "boom" started.

"If you have one, don't touch its leaves because they



Debbie Flay demonstrates plants at Ladies Day Out.

are very delicate and will turn brown," she added, "Fluoride is no good for Spider plants, either." Fluoride can kill about two-thirds of all house plants. The speaker then advised the women that, if fluoride is added to their local drinking water supplies, rain or spring

water would be better for the plants.

Debbie also gave tips on transplanting.

"Don't use dirt from your garden," she said. "Use sterilized potting soil with perlite in it. Transplanting is a very critical point for plants. The soil needs to be very moist before putting the plant into it, then only a very little water should be added. Wait a week after that before you add water again."

"Also," she stated, "do not transplant more than three times in a year because this disrupts the plant's life cycle." Wait until at least four weeks from transplanting before fertilizing a plant, the speaker advised the group. The new "home" is enough of a shock, don't compound it with fertilizer.

Dust can also be a problem, the ladies were told. The leaves are the structures from which they breathe, so they should not be dirty.

"A mister can remove some of the dirt, or you can just wipe each leaf off with a damp cloth on some plants," she said. However, plants with "hair" on their leaves cannot be misted or they will turn brown, the speaker continued.

If pests are a problem, try to get rid of them by yourself, Debbie instructed, before you buy a commercial product. No problems should arise, however, as long as the plants are cared for properly. If a plant does have insects, remove it from the others. The bottom side of the leaves will tell the tale if you suspect insects. This is where the pests will usually be evident.

To remove the insects, cover the soil with paper or something similar and turn the plant upside down, then shake gently. After doing this, use a mild detergent and wipe each leaf off individually. Next, rinse the plant and repeat the process twice a week if necessary.

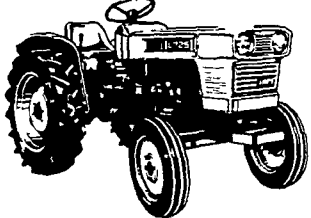
Before finishing the plant lecture, Debbie advised the ladies about fertilization of house plants. For the average person, she recommended a mild fertilizer which can be mixed with water. This way fertilizer can be added when the plants are watered and it is less likely that the plants will be over-fertilized.

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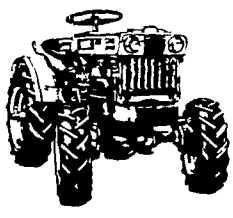


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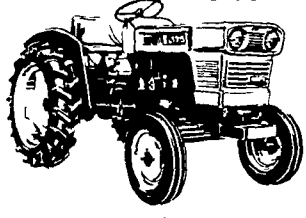


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