

On being a farm wife -And other hazards Joyce Bupp



Beyond the fragile barriers of two panes of clear glass sandwiching dead-air insulation space, this January day is lead-gray and dull. Clouds hang just above the tree-tops, threatening the imminent start of some sort of messy, mid-winter mix of moisture.

But the "in" side of the window barrier boasts an old friend, parked on the windowsill, brightening even the dreariest of such days. Above the plastic pot it displays wide, roundish leaves, crisp and deep green, with a zoned area of a much paler shade. Newer leaves cover the plant's center, displaying almost silvery-colored markings on their smaller surfaces.

Rising through the leaf cover, on slender, reddish stems, are the earliest buds of the cyclamen's annual array of delicate, long-lasting blooms. The tightly-furled buds are suggestive of some species of heron, tiny green heads with giant fushia-colored beaks, perched on a super-skinny neck. At least a dozen and a half of the buds are already poking from the crown of this beauty.

Lack of competition from fields, garden and perennial border during this period of winter dormancy allows for real enjoyment of prized houseplants. The cyclamens' preference for cold temperatures and mid-winter blooms won my affection years ago. My present trio of mature specimens will color the windowsill behind the kitchen sink almost through Easter, while another

half-dozen seedlings thrive in the chilly environment of our little greenhouse.

Houseplants become an extension of self when you've had them very long, almost like part of the family. When they behave and perform well, they inspire great pride. Occasionally they frustrate, plagued with infestations, fungi or just a general "blah" look. No, I don't go around talking to each one, but.... well, maybe sometimes.

The lone African violet is waving fat clusters of double royal-purple blooms above its fuzzy leaves, after suffering a summer-long bout of neglect. Its fellow houseplants usually vacation outside or at least bask in the breezes of the open windows. Having wiped out my share of African violets over the year by exposing them to summer breezes, I've learned to shield them from fresh air. A safe spot is also often a forgotten spot; the violet no doubt figured the only way to get any attention was to burst into bloom. Mission accomplished.

A venerable jade plant summers on the porch but hibernates in the living room. At more than thirty inches high and wide, it's become the housecat's house-bush. She stalks behind it, sulks behind it and uses it as a launch site for guerilla-tactic pouncing at unsuspecting passersby and toy balls left laying on the floor.

Years ago, a small Boston fern found its way here from some fellow plant lover and has repro-

duced like the proverbial rabbit. When the original waved fronds a yard long and filled a large pot, I butchered it into sections with a large kitchen knife and replanted the sections. Each section in turn followed suit, was attacked with a knife, and on and on.

Likewise with a small palm plant, apparently inspired by the reckless abandon with which the fern family was expanding. Between the ferns and the palms, I've pondered opening a rent-a-plant business.

"Christmas" cacti are just now blooming, save for one plant recently acquired at a church bazaar. Perhaps this particular specimen, with very tiny "crab" foliage segments, is instead a Memorial Day or Halloween cactus. That element of surprise - the unexpected bloom or unusual color - is part of the intrigue of houseplants.

And so are the memories they represent - cascading bridal wreath from our summer wedding, a Mother's Day hanging basket gift, begonias snatched from the icy jaws of frost, and geraniums rescued from storm flooding.

They give so much - and ask so little in return. Show'em you care. Hug your houseplants. Everything but a cactus.

Young Designers Compete In 'Make It Yourself' Contest

(DENVER, Colo.) — The nation's top young designers will be in the spotlight January 13-14 in the National Make It Yourself With Wool competition at the Hyatt Regency in Phoenix, Arizona. The national competition is the culmination of 38 state competitions with states sending their top winners on to the national contest. At the contest, the winners are judged by a panel of experts made of some of the top textile and design professionals in the country.

The events are held in conjunction with the American Sheep Industry Convention on January 14-17. The annual convention attracts more than 1,300 sheep producers, agribusiness people, educators, and government officials.

Marta Alto of Palmer Pietsch in Portland, Oregon, heads the panel of judges. Alto is nationally known for her workshops on serging, and has conducted more than 200 workshops. On Saturday, January 13, she will host a custom workshop on sewing with ultra suede for the contestants.

State winners will compete Saturday and Sunday, January 13-14. Winners will be announced in a fashion show Sunday at 7 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency. Tickets for the event are available at the door.

In addition to the Make It Yourself With Wool fashion show, the American Sheep Industry Women will host a wool fashion show and luncheon on Monday, January 15. Tickets are \$25, and will be available at the show.

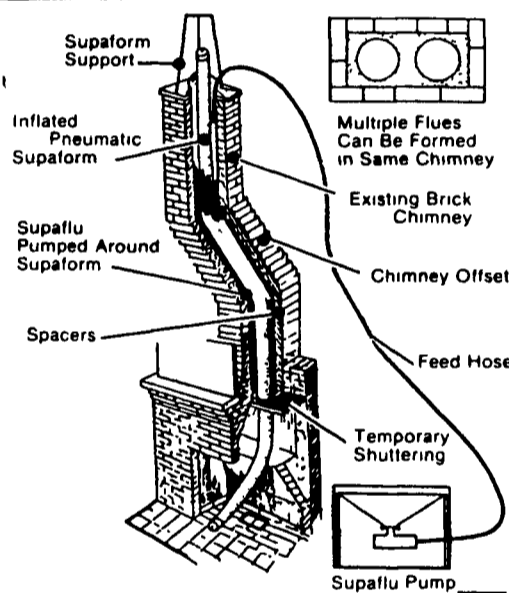
Home Schooler Club

WEST CHESTER (Chester Co.) — A new and exciting club has been added to the 4-H program in Chester County. Primarily represented by parent educators and their children, the Home-schooler 4-H Club meets as family groups to discuss each of their 4-H projects which include Adopt-a-Tree, Meet the Plants, Embryology and Woodworking for Wild-

life. The interests of the children 8 to 9 years old determine the nature of the project that they choose.

The Homeschoolers 4-H Club presently meets from 1 to 2:30 p.m. on the third Friday of each month in the Carriage House at Springton Manor County Park, Glenmoore. For further information, contact organizational leader Cindy Valentino at 436-8141.

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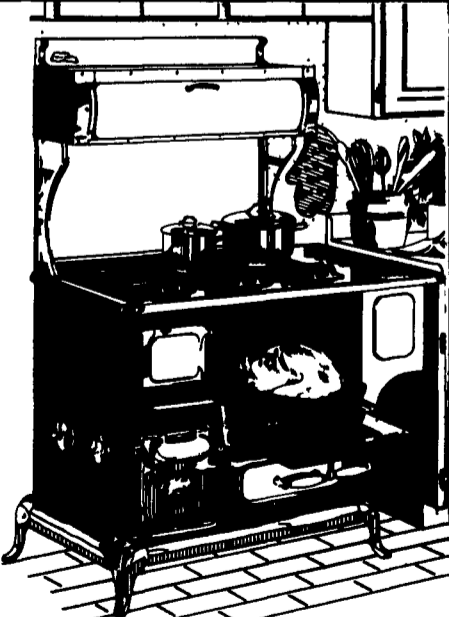
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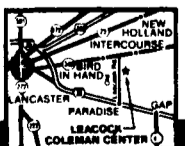
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