

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Even if there's snow on the ground and the weather is frigid, your home may be drier than a desert this winter, says a housing expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Warm air holds much more moisture than cold air," says Dr. Phyllis Adams-Barner, associate professor of agricultural and extension education. "When the

outdoor temperature drops, so does the air's ability to hold moisture. During the heating season, a home's relative humidity can be 15 percent or lower. At this point, the air in a home is drier than that in the Sahara Desert."

Excessive dry air inside your house can affect your health and cause a variety of other problems. "People living in very dry homes may experience sore and raspy

throats, dry skin and stuffy noses," Adams-Barner says. "They can feel cold when the temperature indoors registers 70 degrees."

A lack of moisture also affects interior furnishings. "Doors will warp and wooden panels will shrink," she says. "Furniture tends to dry out, crack and shrink at glue joints. You'll receive static electricity shocks when touching metal after walking across a carpet or

rug. Also, plants wilt and die more rapidly due to increased evaporation from their leaves."

Relative humidity gauges available in stores will give an accurate reading to within 10 percent. "A relative humidity level of 30 to 50 percent will provide a comfortable home environment," Adams-Barner says. "If your home has a lower relative humidity, consider adding small amounts of moisture to the air."

Moisture can be added to dry air in several ways. "Moisture vapor from a single source travels quickly," Adams-Barner says. "Boiling a teakettle of water on the stove, for instance, will add moisture to the air throughout your house." Moisture accumulation also

results from everyday activities such as bathing, cooking and washing clothes. "If the humidity in your house is too low, don't run an exhaust fan after each bath or shower," Adams-Barner says.

Special products are available to put water vapor into the home's heating system. "Reducing the indoor temperature is another way to increase the relative humidity and increase your comfort," she says. "Portable humidifiers also can do the job, depending on the size of the home."

It may be necessary to add moisture to the air periodically throughout the heating season.

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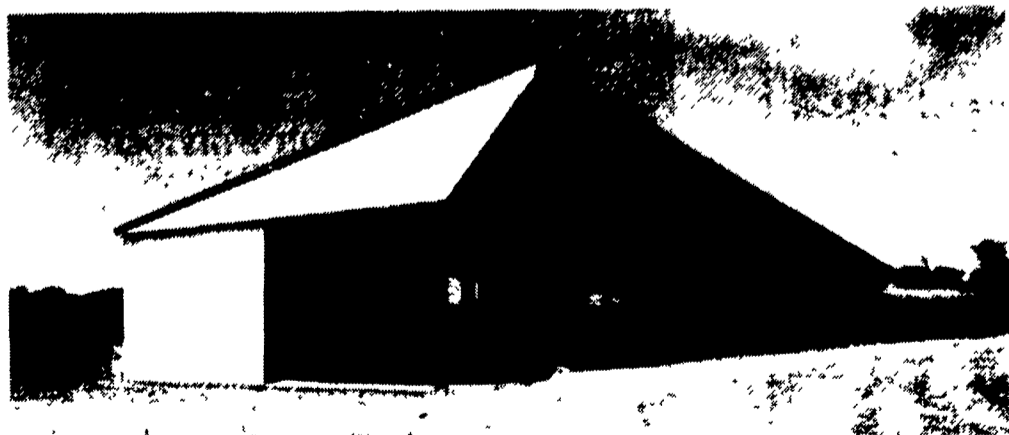
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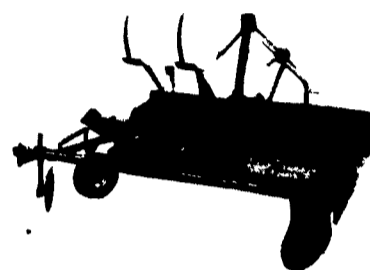
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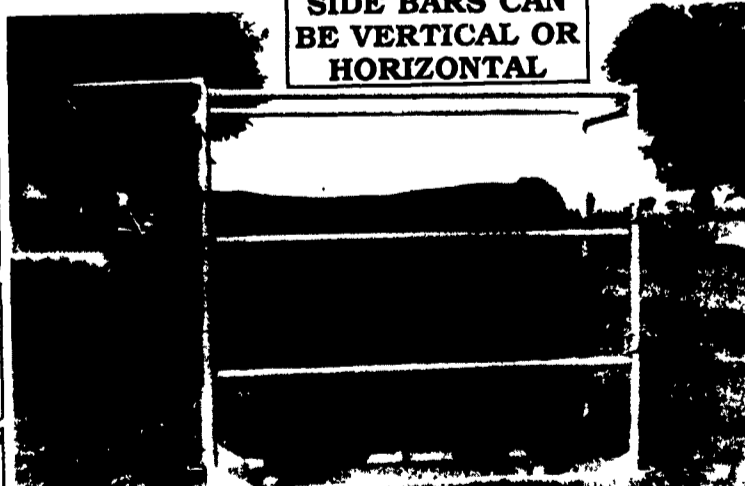
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