

Plants Fantastic: Exotics, And Only Exotics, Imbue Birdsboro Greenhouse

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Lancaster Farming Staff
BIRDSBORO (Berks Co.) — In this greenhouse, the "oohs" and "ahhs" were palpable. "It's like a different world," said Barbara Livezey, Tulpehocken Junior High School health and physical education teacher. "You

almost have to ask someone to remind you of where you're at." Livezey, who was looking at a dwarf burrows plant hanging in a subtropical greenhouse, accompanied more than two dozen other Berks County teachers last week on one of several tours of retail florists and nurseries as part of the



Barbara Livezey, Tulpehocken Junior High School teacher, inspects the stridently interwoven, long strands of the rat-tail cactus, which bears big, red flowers, one of the most "common" of the exotic cacti.



One orchid Mutschler is particularly proud of is the Dracula Orchid from Ecuador. Mutschler said the orchid grows in the entrance to caves in the western South American country.



Mutschler's Florist and Rare Plants not only has an extensive greenhouse filled with tropical plants, but also a sprawling outside compliment of winter-hardy cacti and a good complement of ponds — 28 in all, managed by employee Jeff Jackson. Bob Mutschler instructs the tour group at the largest pond, measuring 15 feet by 30 feet and is three feet deep, constructed six years ago.

county's popular Ag In The Classroom Seminar.

This time, the teachers witnessed the beauty and wonder of the thousands of exotic plants at Mutschler's Florist and Rare Plants on Perkiomen Avenue near Birdsboro.

Some members of the tour group branched off, winding their way through the greenhouse — a place that seemed literally torn out of the rain forests of Brazil, filled with more than 25 varieties of orchids, exotic cacti, plants from Africa, Ecuador, and varieties of species unseen and largely unheard of in a "typical" Pennsylvania nursery.

"We avoid the 'common' as much as we can, and we find it works for us very, very well," said Bob Mutschler, who has operated the four-acre nursery with his wife, Elsie, for 11 years.

Teachers on the tour would repeat, almost like a canon, that for years they drove by the exotic greenhouse, not knowing it even existed just off Rt. 422 a few miles east of the Rt. 176 interchange.

Nursery sales are 90 percent retail and 10 percent wholesale at Mutschler's. The nursery supplies all fresh-market plants and flowers and some silk. The nursery decorates for weddings one day a week and performs landscape work on a small basis, perhaps 2-3 per year.

Mutschler said they recently completed an entirely "desert" landscape for a local resident. Another one "was totally oriental in design," he said. "It was really exotic.

"We don't accept the 'normal' types of jobs," he said.

Mutschler has taught for more than three decades at the Western Center for Technology Studies and has taught plant properties at Penn State and orchidology at the University of Florida.

The nursery not only has an extensive greenhouse filled with tropical plants. It also has, sprawling in various places in the outside display area, winter-hardy cacti and a good complement of ponds — 28 in all, managed by employee Jeff Jackson.

One pond measures 15 feet by 30 feet and is three feet deep, constructed six years ago.

Outside, near a small storage area greenhouse, towering bamboo sprouts from an area used during classes conducted regularly by the nursery. Gary Collier, Reading High School teacher and a director

of the Wilson School district, looked over the bamboo.

"I'd like to have bamboo growing at my place," Collier said.

Outside, the grounds are cov-

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