

Softened Water Can Cause Hard Times For Indoor Plants

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.)—If your indoor plants or plants brought in for the winter seem to be faring poorly, a Penn State horticulture

expert suggests taking a hard look at softened water as the culprit.

"There isn't any research that tells us which plants can be in-

jured, but plants do vary widely in their tolerance for softened water," said J. Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture in the College of Agri-

cultural Sciences. "In many cases, water from a mechanical softener will harm plant growth."

Nuss explains that hard water

contains large amounts of calcium and magnesium, which are plant nutrients. However, these minerals reduce how well soap lathers when washing clothing or other items. "The minerals in hard water often combine with soap to form the ring you see in bathtubs or wash bowls," he says.

Many homeowners soften their water by using a filtration system to exchange the calcium and magnesium in the water for sodium, creating a softer water that allows soap to function better.

"Sodium is used by plants only in very small amounts," Nuss says. "Over long periods of time, too much sodium becomes toxic."

Nuss says excess sodium will damage the soil quality around the plant's root system by breaking down the soil structure, thus reducing drainage. Nuss says savvy plant lovers can save their plants in several ways.

•Leaching. Using rainwater or unsoftened water to water your plants will leach high levels of sodium out of the soil.

•Elevation. By placing your plant on gravel or a similar material, a reservoir is formed to collect water passing through the soil. "Never allow plants to stand in softened water," Nuss warns.

•Repotting. Fresh potting soil will provide a new environment for the roots, free of excess salts.

Other water additives used by municipal water systems, chlorine and fluorine, also can harm some plants. Trace elements are needed in very small amounts to keep plants healthy. "In excess, like sodium, they can be toxic," he says.

Chlorine generally presents less of a headache for houseplants, Nuss explains. "Chlorine can be eliminated from water by heating or aeration, or by letting the water stand in a container overnight before watering the plants."

Fluorine can adversely affect plants at concentrations as low as .1 part per million. In some municipal water supplies, 10 times that amount is added to prevent tooth decay. "A good indicator of fluorine content is the spider plant, or Chlorophytum, which will show spotted leaves or burned tips when fluorine is present," Nuss says.

Houseplant gardeners can deter the effects of fluorine by adding two teaspoons of limestone per six-inch pot of soil. Lime raises the pH of the soil and combines with fluoride in a chemically insoluble form that plants cannot take up through the roots, according to Nuss.

Dairy Of Distinction Seeks Nice Looking Farms

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — Do you take pride in maintaining your dairy farm? Does your farm project an attractive, wholesome image to consumers? If so, the Dairy of Distinction Program of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Vermont is looking for you.

The Northeast Dairy Farm Beautification Program that oversees the Distinction program was first started in 1983 in Pennsylvania. The Dairy of Distinction recognize the hard work and dedication of the farmers who maintain attractive farms.

The purpose of the program is to instill a greater sense of confidence in the wholesomeness of dairy products, thus increasing sales.

Farms that apply are judged on the roadside appearance of building, grounds, and surroundings, since this is what our dairy product consumers observe as they drive by the farm.

The cleanliness of the barnyard, feed areas, and manure management are all areas taken into consideration when a team of judges takes a look at your farm from the road. Your milk cooperative or handler will be contacted to approve your milk quality.

Judging is conducted during the month of May. Award winners are announced during local June Dairy Month activities.



Del-Jame Farm near Hamburg in Berks County is a 1999 Dairy of Distinction winner. Since the program began in 1987 in Pennsylvania, more than 700 farms have been given this farm beautification award. Entries are now being received for the year 2000 program. Take time to enter your farm now.

ties. To qualify for consideration, you must be actively dairy farming and shipping milk.

Applications are available for Pennsylvania dairy farms from Michael O'Conner, 324 Henning Building, Dept. of Dairy and Animal Science, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802. Phone: (814) 863-3913.

New York State applications are available from Carol Keene-Ainsille, 3993 Jordonville Road,

Jordonville, NY 13361. Phone: (315) 858-2770.

For New Jersey applications, contact Joy Ricker, 91 Beemer Road, Sussex, NJ 07461. Phone: (973) 875-4803.

For Vermont applications, send to Elisa Clancy, Vermont Department of Agriculture, 16 State Street, Drawer 20, Montpelier, VT 05620-2901. Phone: (802) 828-3835.

All applications must be completed and returned to your re-

spective state secretary by April 15, 2000.

The Dairy of Distinction program is financed in Pennsylvania by dairy farmers through the American Dairy Association & Dairy Council Mid East and the Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Program in cooperation with many local agribusiness organizations. The program is conducted with advice and help from the Penn State Cooperative Extension.

Dairy of Distinction 2000 Pennsylvania Application

PURPOSE OF PROGRAM

Attractive dairy farms give the consumer greater confidence in the wholesomeness of milk and stimulate milk sales which encourages public support for the dairy industry. The award gives recognition to the dairy farmer for maintaining a well-kept farmstead.

ELIGIBILITY

All Northeast dairy farms producing milk for sale are invited to submit an application for the award. Dairies receiving the 10 highest scores in each of the 21 districts will receive an 18" x 24" Dairy of Distinction sign to be displayed in front of their farm.

APPLICATION

Your Name _____ Farm Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone Number _____

Cooperative or Handler (where you ship your milk, be specific) _____

(Your Handler will be contacted to approve your milk quality)

Location (driving directions for judging team) _____

County (where your farm is located) _____

I hereby apply to the Northeast Dairy Farm Beautification Committee to have my dairy scored in accordance with the rules of the program for the purpose of obtaining a Dairy of Distinction sign to be displayed on my premises. (No producer will be charged for scoring or sign expense.)

Signature Owner/Operator _____ Date _____

Return your application by April 15 to:

✓ **PENNSYLVANIA** — Michael O'Conner, 324 Henning Building, Dept. of Dairy and Animal Science, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802

✓ **NEW YORK** — Carol Keene-Ainsille, 3993 Jordonville Road, Jordonville, NY 13361

✓ **NEW JERSEY** — Joy Ricker, 91 Beemer Road, Sussex, NJ 07461

✓ **VERMONT** — Elisa Clancy, Vermont Department of Agriculture, 16 State St., Drawer 20, Montpelier, VT 05620-2901

HOW IS YOUR FARM SCORED?

Northeast Dairy Farm Beautification Program Inc.

Awards will be based upon neatness, good maintenance, and other factors that can be controlled by the farmer. Attractive background scenery should not be weighted heavily in judging. All judging observations should be made from a vehicle at one or more points on an adjacent public highway. If the farm is off the road, the judging will take place from the nearest lane. Judging should give equal consideration to old wood construction and new construction of metal or concrete block.

The award program may be used for subsequent advertising or promotion activities for dairy products or dairy farming. Farmers who apply for the award agree that if selected they will cooperate with these promotion activities and make all reasonable efforts to maintain both the exterior and interior of their properties in an acceptable manner.

HOW THE APPLICATION WORKS

The owner or operator of the dairy farm should sign the application and send it to the Dairy of Distinction state secretary by April 15.

HOW THE JUDGING WORKS

Judging teams will visit farms during the month of May. Farms will be judged each year as the award is presented on an annual basis. Any dairy failing to maintain appearance standards will be asked to remove their signs. The Dairy of Distinction signs remain the property of the committee, not the property of the dairy farmer. All farms must achieve a compliance score of 90 percent on their Dairy of Distinction score card. Your cooperative or milk handler will be contacted to approve your milk quality.

RULES FOR THE DAIRY OF DISTINCTION AWARD

- 1) The Dairy of Distinction sign remains property of the Northeast Dairy Farm Beautification Committee.
- 2) The post and bracket shall be supplied by and maintained by the dairy farmer. It is suggested that a wood post 4' x 4' x 12' or iron pipe 2' x 12' can be used. Posts or pipe should be installed and maintained in true vertical position with 8' above ground. Top of the bracket should be lower than six inches from the top of the post.
- 3) Signs shall be displayed in front of the dairy at roadside. An attractive post or bracket, or other frame, shall be used to display the sign. No more than three signs should be displayed from the sign frame or post, and all shall be of a style, general size, and quality comparable to the Dairy of Distinction sign. Sign should be secured on all sides to avoid wind damages.
- 4) Signs shall not be moved to other premises. New owners of a Dairy of Distinction farm must apply to retain the sign.
- 5) Replacement of damaged signs is at the committee's discretion.
- 6) No producer shall be charged with scoring or sign expenses.
- 7) Judges' decisions will be final.
- 8) Judging will take place between May 1st and May 31st.
- 9) Farms awarded a Dairy of Distinction sign in previous years will be judged between April 1st and April 30th. If they do not qualify, they will be rejudged between May 1st and May 31st so they have the opportunity to keep the sign.
- 10) Farms that do not requalify will return the sign to their regional Dairy of Distinction committee.

**A LESSON
WELL
LEARNED...
LANCASTER
FARMING'S
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ADS
GET RESULTS!**