

Pay special attention to tropical plants



A GREENER THUMB

Mark Cullen

Now is the time to pay special attention to your indoor tropical plants. Some may need a soil change and can be repotted into the same pot (cleaned and sterilized) if the roots have not outgrown the container. Others may need repotting into a larger pot if they've started to push roots out of the bottom of their present container.

If you need to repot any of your plants, loosen the soil around the edges of the container and then lay the pot on its side. (Make sure that you put lots of newspapers underneath to minimize the clean-up.) Gently pull the plant out of the pot and loosen the tightly woven root with a fork. Don't be too concerned if you tear some of the roots in the process. Repot the plant into a new container, or a used one that has been well sterilized. Use a fresh, sterile potting mixture to replant, and make sure that you pack the soil down well to avoid air pockets that can dry out the roots. I keep an old ruler handy for this purpose.

If you are repotting some plants, don't fertilize them until new growth starts to appear.

If the soil surface looks white and crusty from salt and mineral deposits, but the plants appear healthy and happy, then don't worry about repotting. Gently remove the top layer and replace it with fresh, sterile potting soil.

These plants can be fertilized right away. Do me a favour, and try fertilizing them with Phostrogen. It is Britain's most popular fertilizer and many English gardeners swear by it.

If you have the time to spare, one of the best things you can do for your indoor plants is wash off the winter dust that's accumulated on their leaves. Clean leaves can breathe easier and that makes for much healthier plants. Mix a diluted solution of insecticidal soap and water and wash down the entire plant, including the tops and bottoms of the leaves and the stem. This will reduce any chance of spidermite infestation.

If tiny black fungus gnats are performing kamikaze dives at your newspaper and at the dinner table, it's time to water a little two per cent Diazinon powder into the soil of each and every plant. No sense doing just a couple of plants, for these little devils will just use another plant's soil to lay their eggs in. Black fungus gnats don't really do your plants much harm—they just feed off the bacteria in the soil—but they sure can be a nuisance!

Watch for ANYTHING GROWS with Mark Cullen CBC-TV Toronto 5, Saturdays at noon. Listen for the GARDEN SHOW with Mark Cullen CFRB 1010, Saturdays 10 to noon.

Soviets have news and views

By JANET DUVAL
Member of "HAND"
Halton Hills Action
for Nuclear Disarmament

Would you believe something written by the Soviet Press Agency? Would you consider it propaganda - or a means to help us understand the Soviet people?

I've been getting their little newsletter "Soviet News and Views" for several years now. They kept my name when the local peace group "HAND" wrote them in 1983 to protest the shooting down of the KAL passenger jet.

The newsletter is a funny mix of political speeches, articles about ballet and hockey, reports on new farming methods and medical breakthroughs, and some letters to the editor. These usually reflect the thinking of the current Soviet leadership.

The latest newsletter tells of war veteran Ivan Bushilo, who's been hiding deep in the woods of Byelorussia for 42 years, ever since Stalin branded him an "enemy of the people."

Finally, "it was his belief that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was sincere which made him turn his back on his woodland life and

pick up the threads of a shattered life."

Just as interesting is a poll of 922 Moscow residents regarding perestroika. While 82 per cent of them think the Soviet Union's economic position has become worse in the last three or four years, a huge majority also think that perestroika is a good policy, but "changes should be made faster." Only five per cent say the policy is wrong, "we must go back to our previous politics."

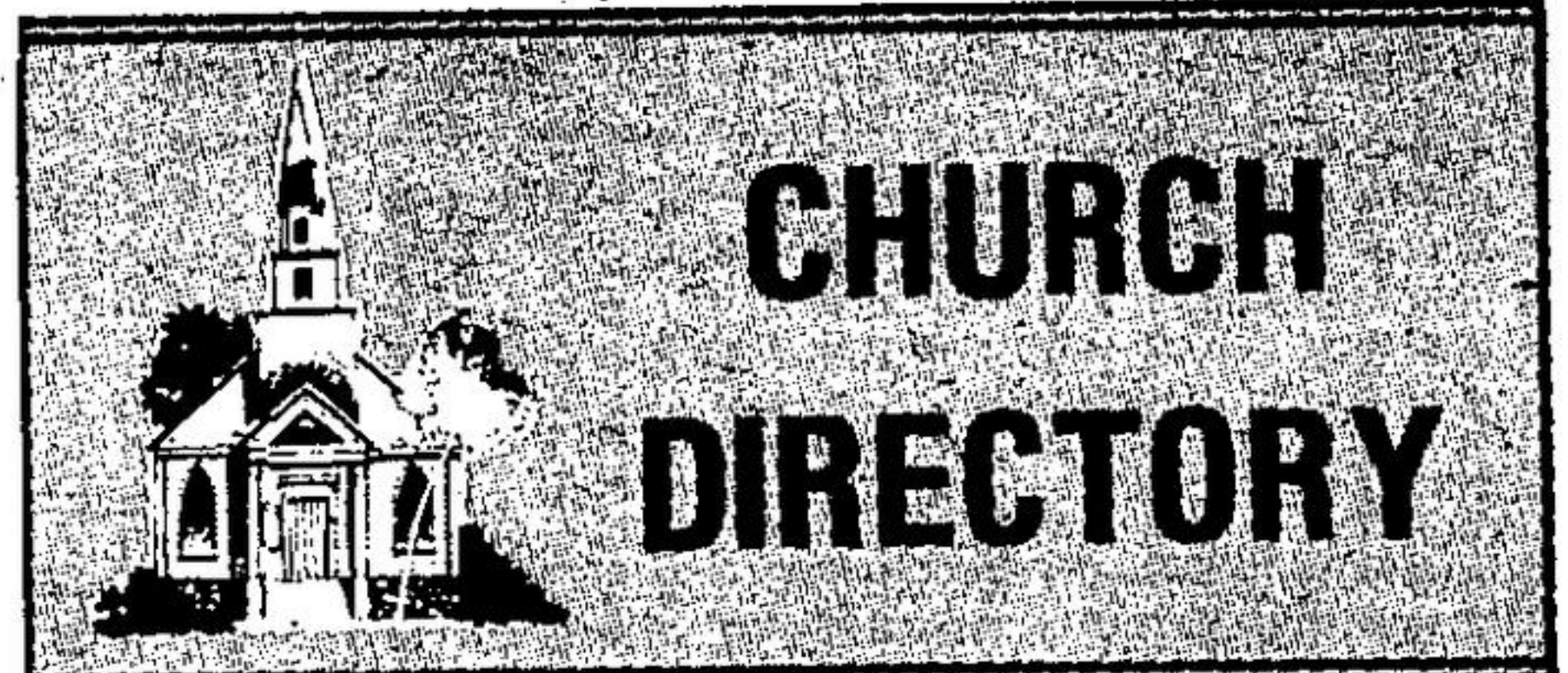
There are intriguing views on current economic changes. Weary of shoddy production and long lineups for basic consumer goods, fully 74 per cent react favorably to the idea of competition. However

only 53 per cent like the idea of "profit," and there's an even split on "planning."

While 61 per cent favor socialism, there's strong scepticism of the merits of both communism and capitalism: both received the support of less than 40 per cent of those polled.

Asked if they think Gorbachev's policy will succeed during the next five years, 57 per cent think it will. It's notable that people over 60 years of age are far more optimistic on this question than young people.

The newsletter also reports on a "most unpleasant issue - the disintegration of the world's largest country."



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