Town Gardener

Follow basic formula when caring for houseplants

By TOM CAVAN Herald Special The Flora Triangle

This time of year I become inundated with questions about indoor plants dropping foliage, or showing signs of deterioration depending on the type of plant in question. The conversation typically began with "I do so well with all my plants but lately ...". or "I do the same thing for all my plants but this one ..." There is no mystery as to why plants what they do, the plants have symptoms which indicate what is wrong. Where do you begin when accessing a plant?

You simply have to look at the symptoms and think back about 2-4 weeks prior to the plants decline in health and you will be able to pin-point the time that the trouble began. This will tell you source, how fast

deterioration is spreading and how long the plant is actually been in misery. If there are no signs of insect or diseases which are visually obvious, the what you have is physical or conditional problem(s) with your plant.

Now, what I mean by that is when the plant is in the wrong location, and, or the plant is not being maintained to its acceptable conditions of habit in order to grow or sustain itself. Now the big mystery is that you haven't changed your maintenance but the plant is showing signs like dropping leaves, taking on a grey appearance or it's not using it's water etc. Well, what has happened is that the conditions of light and heat have changed dramatically.

I have a basic formula which when understood will help you

know how to water a plant and help get your plants through the winter months.

Form a triangle of heat-lightwater.

Quite simply, these three factors affect each other. When one changes the other two have to follow suit. So, if your plant receives more sunlight it will experience more heat and in return will need more water and if you give a plant more water there had better be enough light to the given plant so it will use that water. Pretty straight forward right! Well, that happens when a plant receives heat without sunlight. Plants do not understand heat without light, please tell me where does this happen in nature? It does not. You can use artificial light which will help to some degree, but that will only go so far with numbers of plants that

can fit under the lights and decorating with plants is compromised.

The plants active factory receives a good watering but insufficient sunlight means slow activity and slower transpiration rate, the water sits in the soil and cannot be used. The end result is overwatering, lack of oxygen to the soil and anaerobic microbes, microbes that work without oxygen start to decay the warm water-logged soil. If you increase the sunlight to a plant an increase in temperature will arise and the plant will use more water. When the water increases the sunlight and heat must increase and the same applies if you decrease any of those three factors. If they do not you will have trouble.

So, what is the solution? You have to heat your home in winter, yet Mother Nature provides little

if any sunlight and what we do receive is weak. You must keep your plants in cooler locations, i.e. away from heat registers or fluctuating heat like 5 p.m. when the stove comes on. Allow your plants to dry between waterings, and be sure they never stand in water. Dry is better than wet. If you accidentally over-water a plant take it out of it's container to allow oxygen to dislocate the water and once the plant is back to an evenly moist state place it back in it's pot and return it to it's original site. This is a last resort maneuver. Usually when a plant is over-watered I would recommend repotting and discarding the oil soil.

So keep that triangle in mind and evaluate your plants for better houseplants.

Any questions should be directed to Tom Cavan at the Garden Hotline, 519-833-2117.

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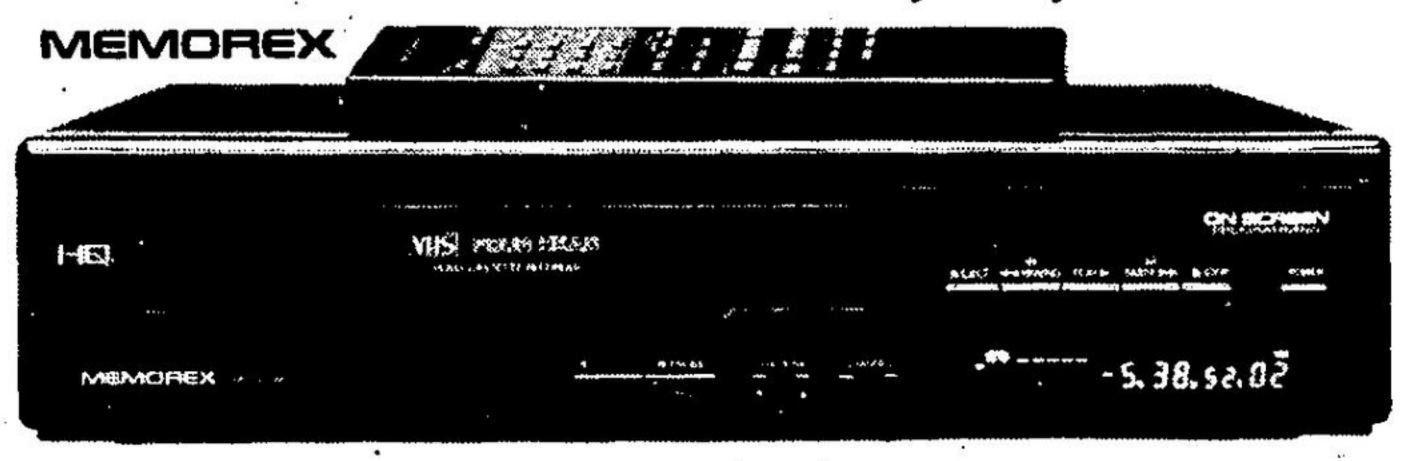


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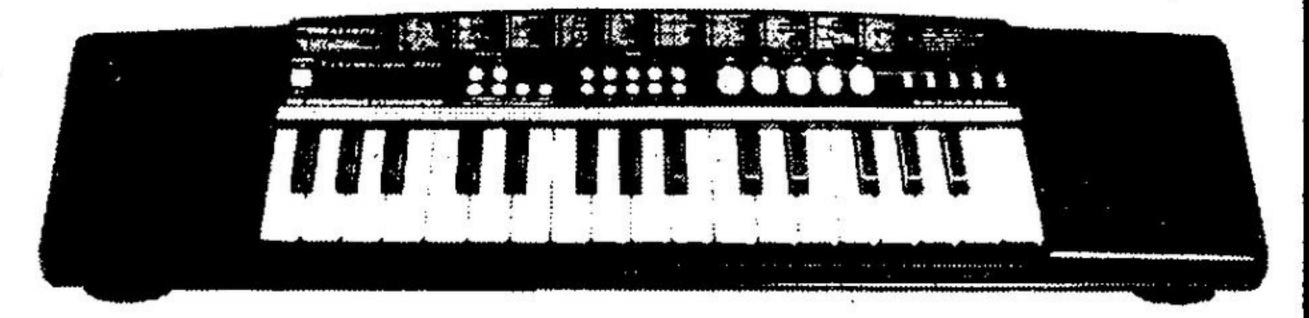
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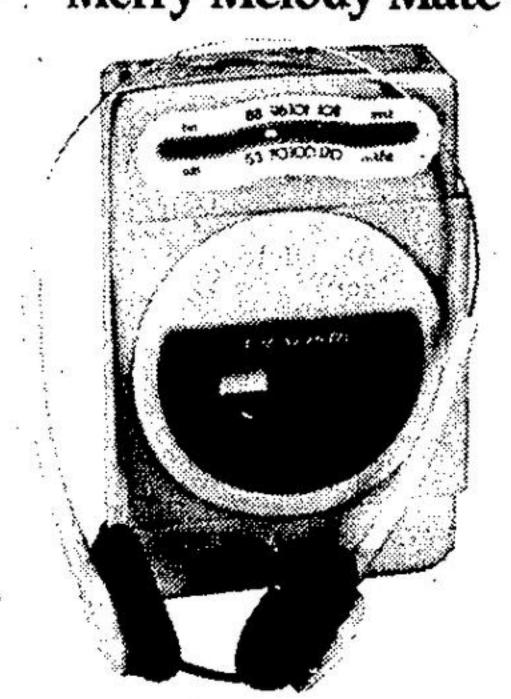
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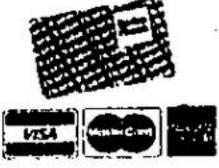
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