

# HOME WORDS

... about home ownership today

Down through the years, plants have played an integral part in home decorating. Victorians, for instance, were noted for decorating their homes with large, colorful ferns and palms. And for centuries, pots of herbs have been a long-standing favorite in many a kitchen windowsill.

If you're trying to think of a way to spruce up the interior of your home this winter without getting bogged down by major redecorating costs, consider the beauty and versatility of houseplants.

Strategically placed in your home, houseplants can fill in awkward gaps, camouflage unsightly areas and bring new color and life to an entire room. You can use them to highlight nooks, alcoves, stairways, etc. And, contrary to what you might think, not all plants require a lot of light. In fact, there are several varieties which prefer diffused or low light.

If you haven't had much success with plants in the past, don't worry; you don't have to be a master gar-

## Create a tropical oasis in your home with houseplants

dener to enjoy thriving houseplants - you don't need a solarium. All that's required is a little patience and persistence - and of course - adequate nutrients and light.

### Planning your indoor garden

To get maximum benefit from decorating with houseplants, it pays to plan your plant decorating scheme carefully. Take a good look around your home and decide where plants would look best.

For instance, do you have side tables or large windowsills that would benefit from some extra color? What about an attractive piece of greenery perched on one of your favorite wooden antiques? Plants and wood are an excellent combination for achieving "earthy," warm tones and a relaxed feeling.

A tree or grouping of tall plants can also serve as an attractive and effective room divider, particularly if you have one large room that serves as both a living and dining room.

Fireplaces can also be greatly enhanced by a bit of greenery - on the mantelpiece or along the hearth. You may even want to consider placing plants inside your fireplace

(if you never use it) for an attractive, colorful effect.

### Thrive on humidity

Aside from the living and dining rooms, consider using plants in the bathroom. Houseplants tend to thrive on the humidity and moisture levels found in this room. They also help to give some visual warmth to a room which can often look austere and uninviting.

Bedrooms are another area of your home where plants can be used effectively to help create the aura of a tropical oasis. A colorful cactus, or a tall palm or ficus tree, for instance, can enhance both the decor and mood of any room, depending on the amount of space and light you have.

If you have any skylights, consider placing some plants underneath them. You'll be amazed at the effects.

### Varieties

Take the lighting in each room in your house into consideration when deciding where to place plants - as well as room temperature. Finding the right location for each type of plant is essential.

Obviously, if you have a plant which requires bright sunlight and

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you stick it in a dimly lit corner, you won't end up with a healthy, thriving specimen. And if you place many types of plants next to direct sources of heat, they are likely to suffer.

Conversely, if you have a plant that prefers diffused, indirect light, don't expect it to respond well to being left in an extremely bright sunlit location.

Varieties you may want to consider for low to medium light areas include philodendrons, peace lilies or Chinese evergreens - to name a few. These beautiful plants are an attractive addition to any home and are excellent for filling in awkward spaces. They are also said to have an added benefit: they help to filter out air pollution.

If you're choosing something for a sunny area, like a south-facing window, then you may want to pick a cactus, jade plant or croton.

### Water and humidity

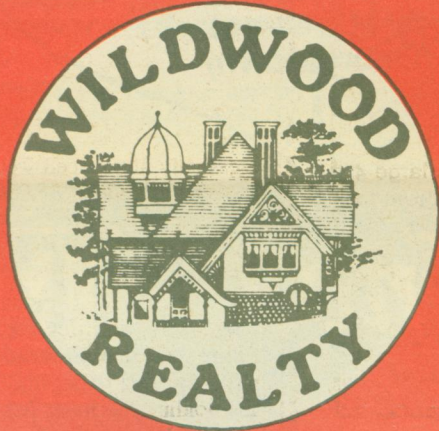
Once you've placed your plants, it's important to make sure they receive the proper amount of light and humidity. Groups of plants together will produce more humidity than individual plants placed in isolated spots around a room.

Most types of plants require watering when the soil no longer has any moisture that can be squeezed out of it. However, plants like cacti should only be watered when the surface soil becomes quite dry. It's very important not to under-water or over-water your plants.

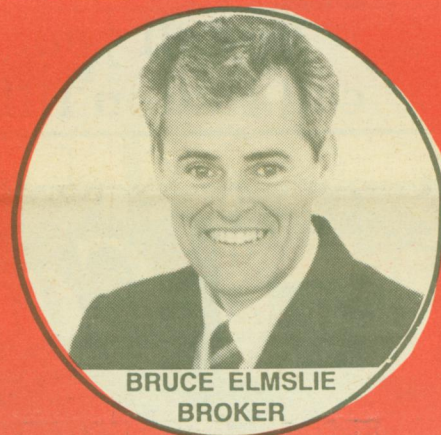
Feeding is also important. Check the information card which came with your plant. It should give the name of the plant, ideal growing temperatures, and when to fertilize. Ask the experts at your local plant store what and when to feed if you're not sure. Obviously, different varieties have different requirements. You can also consult a houseplant book, but of course, it's important to know the name of your plant to do this.

You should also try to keep the leaves free of dust, because plants cannot carry out photosynthesis properly when they're coated with dirt and grime. However, you should avoid cleaning young leaves because they are more fragile.

By investing a little time in some research and planning, you can make your home into a tropical oasis with a few well-chosen houseplants.



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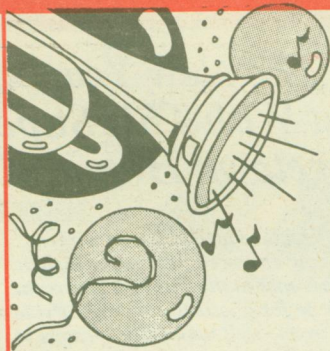
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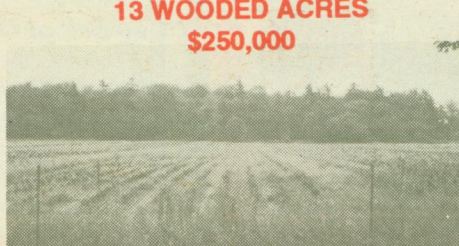
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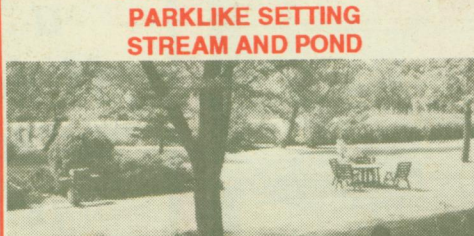
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