

Maintain the feel of summer year round with house plants

With the fall season just around the corner, you may want to take some time out from the joys of outdoor living to think about ways of making your indoor world a little brighter and more cosy this fall and winter.

Without a doubt, house plants are a perfect way to make your home cheerier, healthier (especially if you use plants which help cut down on air pollutants), more decorative and certainly more colorful. Flowering plants in particular can help you maintain the feel of summer all year round indoors—even though the temperature outside may plummet to sub-zero temperatures.

Plants are also a relatively inexpensive way to decorate and can help fill in difficult gaps and camouflage certain items—like radiators, or awkward, unusual areas where nothing else seems to fit.

On the other hand, plants can also be used to highlight special areas of your home, like alcoves, large windows and landings. They can even be placed along the sides of staircases, for a dramatic effect. (Of course, this may not be practical at all, if you have youngsters or pets.)

If you have a finished, heated solarium, you have the perfect place to create a tropical oasis—even in the dead of winter. Almost any plant will thrive in this type of atmosphere, and with some wicker furniture and colorful cushions, you can create a special tropical oasis where you can escape from the harsh realities of winter.

If you already have a number of house plants and merely want to augment your existing stock, take a good look at what you've got and what seems to thrive under certain conditions. Consider light factors, humidity levels and heat. Some plants love low light conditions, while others need a certain amount of direct daily sunlight.

If you're starting from scratch, think carefully about areas of your home where you'd like to put plants. If they seem totally impractical because of light conditions—or simply too difficult to reach for regular maintenance, consider some artificial greenery as a viable alternative. Today's silk plants look so authentic, most people have to touch them to see if they're real or not. If you choose this route, shop around and compare prices. There are many stores available today which specialize solely in artificial plants.

A tree or grouping of tall plants can also serve as an attractive and effective room divider. For example, a ficus tree or group of peace lilies can look particularly appealing.

When choosing plants, look for colors, textures and shapes that appeal to you, then check with garden store staff to see what types of conditions these plants prefer. (Many plants should come with small cards which describe the amount of light, water and fertilizer required.)

Obviously, a sun-loving plant like a cactus

won't appreciate being placed in a dark corner. On the other hand, don't expect a shade-loving plant or low-light plant to thrive in intense sunlight.

Also keep in mind that certain plants such as philodendrons, peace lilies and Chinese evergreens are supposed to help filter out air pollutants.

When purchasing your plants, check the leaves for any signs of damage or insects. Many shops carry guarantees with their plants, so hang onto your sales receipt. If you see roots shooting out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the plant pot, it's a good idea to transplant the plant into a larger container with more soil.

Most plant varieties 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. Never over-water or under-water your plants.

Fertilizing can also give plants a boost. Check with your local gardening centre or consult some library books to see what the experts recommend. Again, it's important not to overdose your plants with fertilizer.

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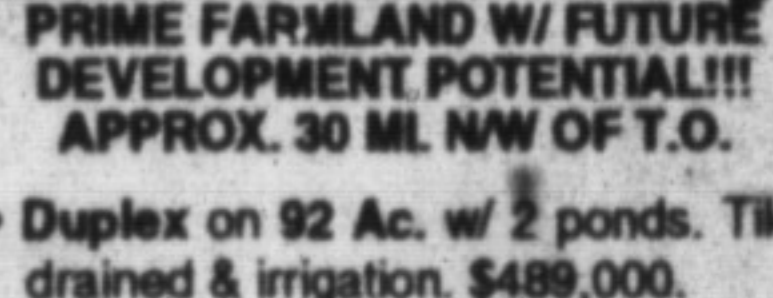
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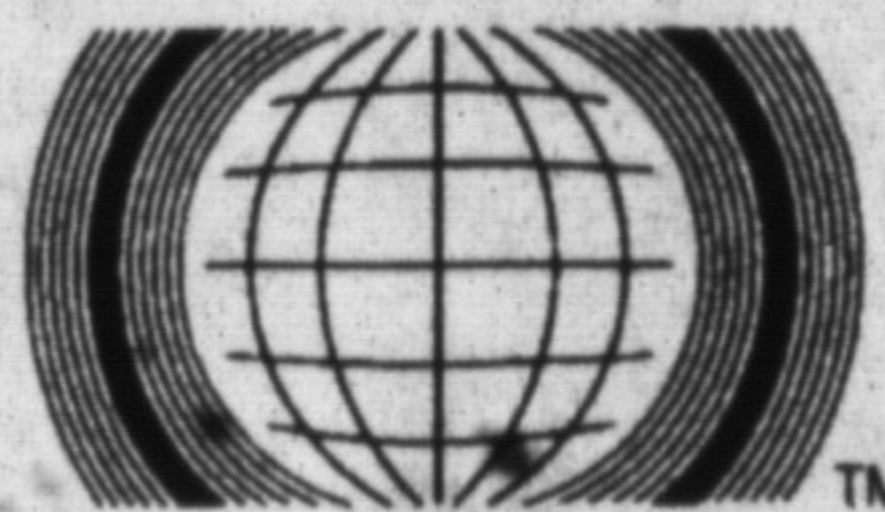
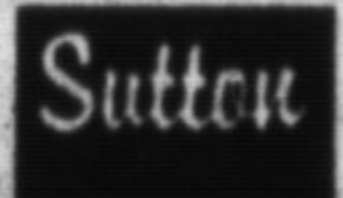


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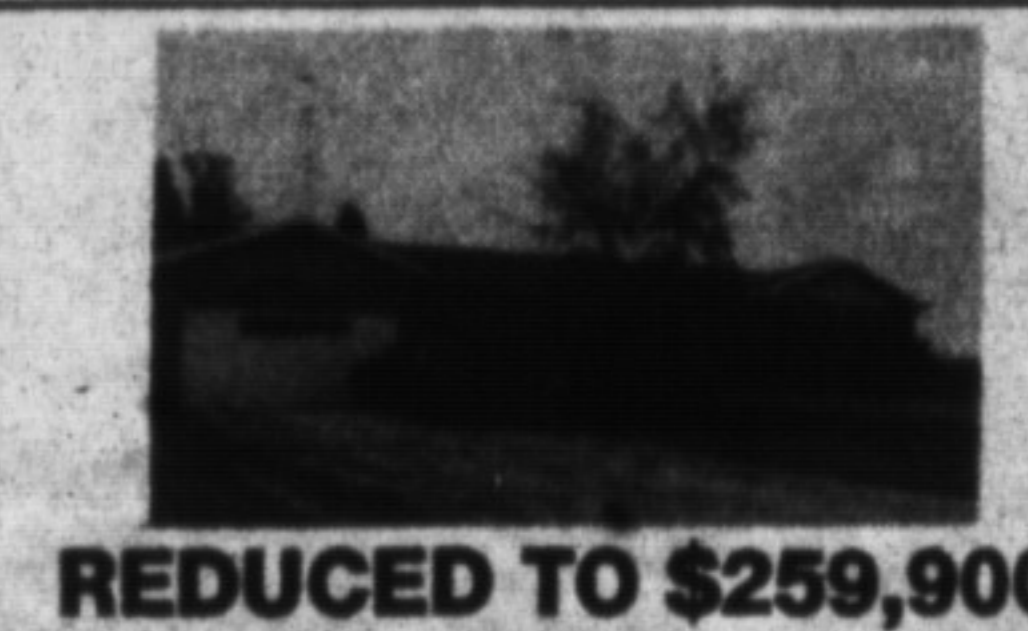
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