

Gardening

Hanging baskets for patio or balcony

Apartment dwellers and other homeowners who find growing space for gardening restricted may find hanging baskets solve the problem. Few crops — flowering or vegetable — won't do well in hanging baskets, says ministry of agriculture and food horticulturist J.K. Hughes.

"Regardless of what is planted in the hanging baskets, it's important to remember that the crop is growing in a restricted area. So these plants will require considerably more water and fertilizer than if they were growing in the ground," he says.

Water is possibly the single most important requirement of a hanging basket, and the soil should be checked regularly. Products are available on

the market to increase moisture retention around the roots.

Mr. Hughes says a new product, Viterra, acts as a sponge, absorbing a large quantity of water and effectively reducing the frequency of watering.

If necessary, fertilizer can be carefully incorporated into the basket, but it must be done in such a way that the roots of growing plants are not disturbed. Most slow-release fertilizers will provide sufficient nutrients for the whole season.

Insects can be as much nuisance in hanging baskets as in garden beds. If treatment for insects is needed, gardeners should apply one of the recommended materials available at garden supply centers.

Garden babysitter

Mulching could be the answer to many gardening problems. It will cut down on the need for laborious weeding and cultivations and will act as a babysitter while you are on your summer vacation.

"One of the main reasons gardens lose their early summer beauty is lack of water, and vacation time is the obvious period when your garden will be most neglected," says Ontario ministry of agriculture and food horticulturist, J.K. Hughes.

This places a strain on the plants and results in weaker, poorer growth.

By beginning your garden mulching in the spring, the plants will be better able to withstand the intense heat of summer. Mulching involves the spreading of organic or inorganic material around the base of plants.

The depth of the mulch depends upon

the type of material used. Black plastic sheeting may be between half to one millimetre thick, while grass clippings may be an inch or more.

Mulches reduce topsoil moisture loss, prevent surface crusting of the soil, and cut down on soil temperature fluctuations. By covering the soil underneath the plants and excluding light from the soil surface, weed growth can be retarded if not completely suppressed.

Mulching also prevents erosion or the washing away of good topsoil. In addition, as the organic mulches decompose, they add valuable humus to the soil.

Black plastic stretched over the soil between the rows can hasten plant maturity and hold in soil moisture, but it should be removed at the end of the growing season.

Hollyhock rust time

If your hollyhocks are becoming unsightly before their bloom is finished, with the leaves turning yellow and dropping off, they could be infected with hollyhock rust.

Professor C.B. Kelly with the environmental biology department, Ontario Agricultural College says: "A severe attack of hollyhock rust may result in stunting, unthrifty growth, a delay in blooming, and fewer flowers."

Hollyhocks are perennials that grow up to 10 feet high in good fertile soil. They have large crinkled leaves and a spike of single or double flowers in many colors, from pure white to deep scarlet.

Healthy, well-grown plants start to flower in July and will continue to bloom for a long time after.

The best time to catch hollyhock rust

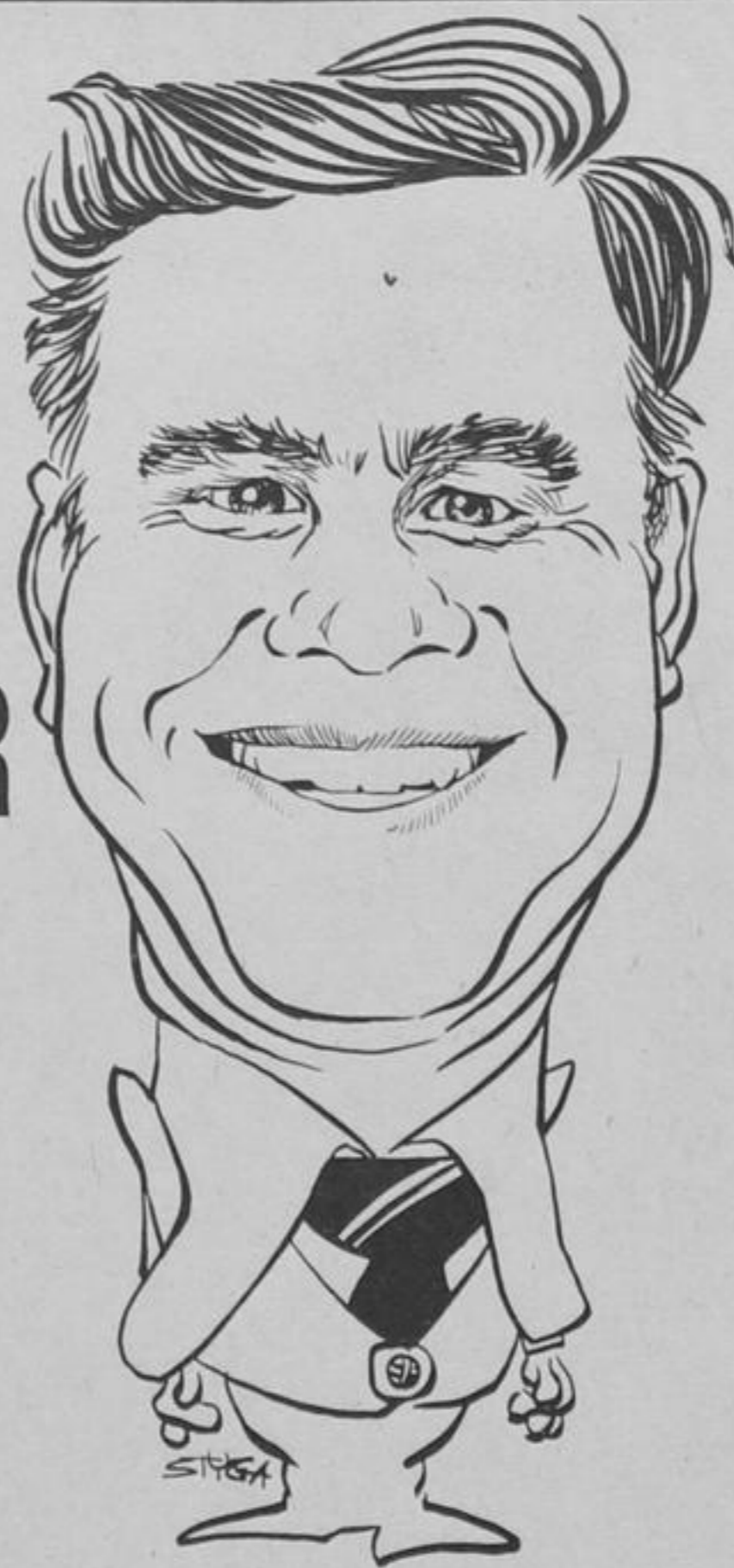
is in the spring. Examine the new growth at the base of the plant. If the foliage is infected, there will be small yellow spots on the upper surface of the leaves and numerous orange-to reddish-brown or gray rust pustules on the lower surface, beneath the yellow spots.

Professor Kelly advises gardeners to "spray or dust two or three times with a home garden product recommended for flowers that contain zineb or mancozeb fungicides, to prevent further spread of the disease."

Once the blooms are finished, cut off the hollyhock tops, gather the fallen leaves and burn or bury them."

All new plants should be started as far away as possible from older hollyhocks, he says. Spraying or dusting the foliage will protect them from rust.

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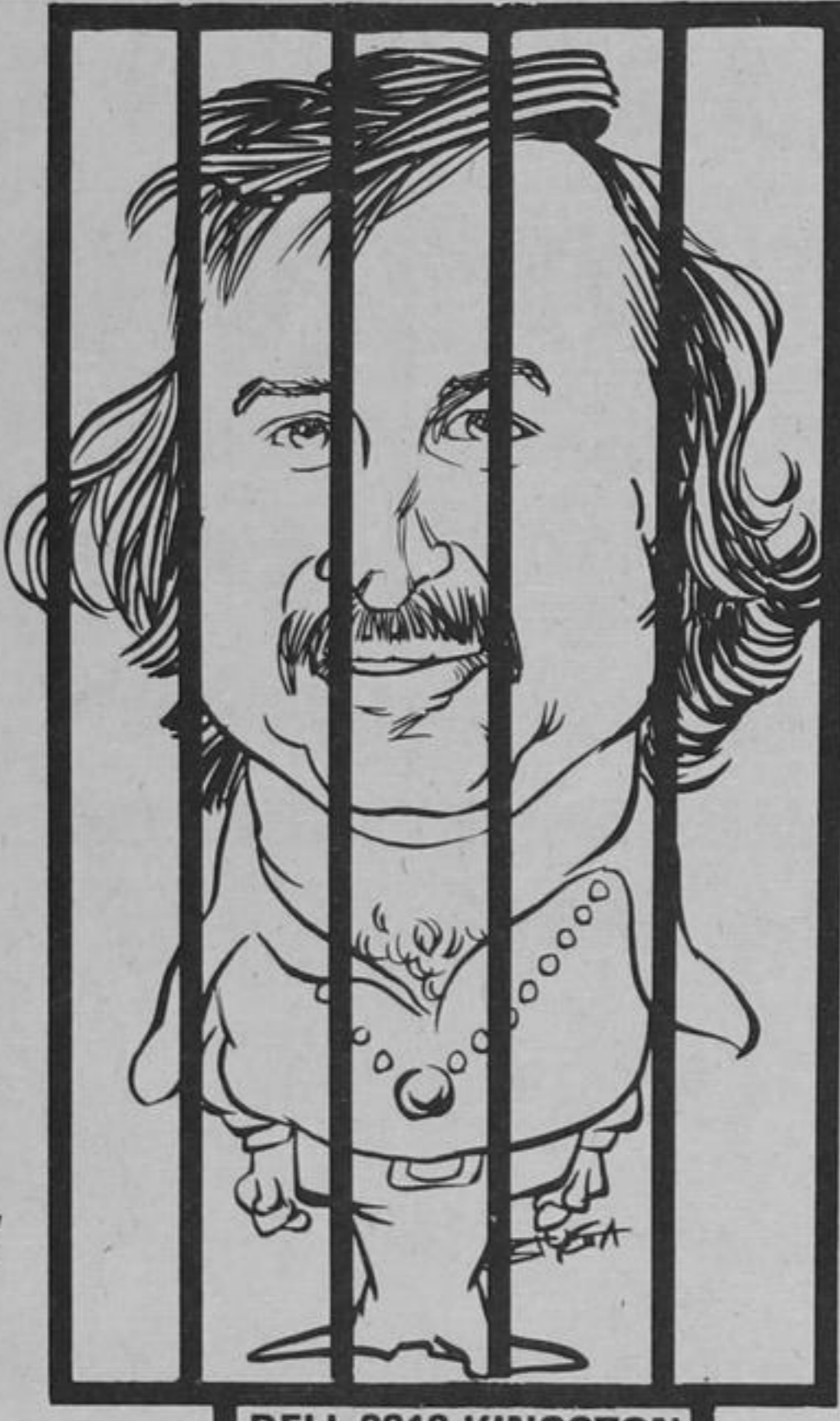
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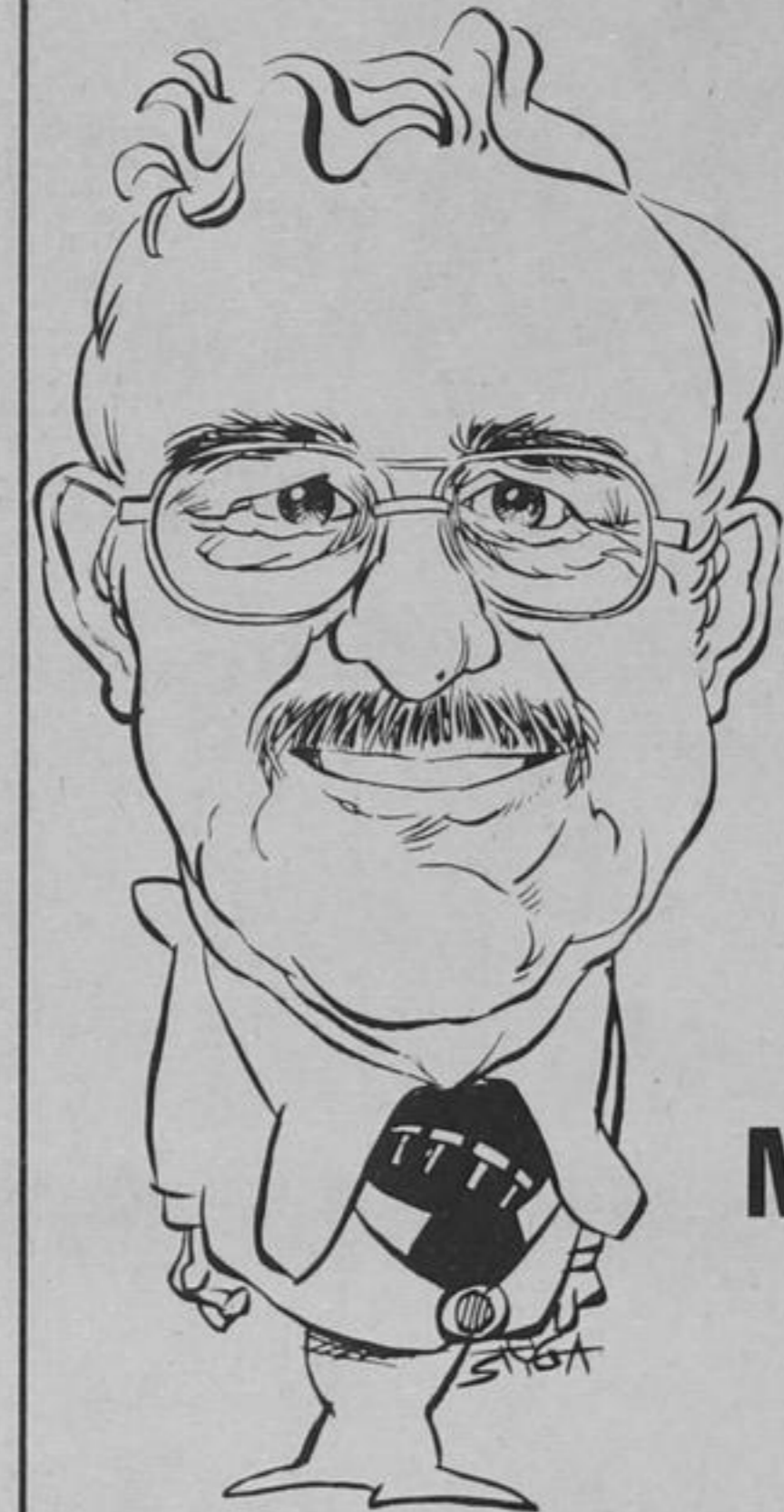
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