

Green'n'growing

Yule tips for plants

By ELAINE GORDON

For the pleasure of giving and the joy of receiving, gift plants with showy flowers or interesting fruits offer beauty for everyone.

Some, like the Christmas Cactus and Poinsettia, are easy houseguests and if conditions are favorable, can become permanent residents.

Generally, they prefer a brightly-lit, draft-free, airy environment and if this is married to a little basic know-how (and lots of TLC), blooming times and fresh appearances can be lengthened.

They'll languish near heat or in stuffy, overheated areas so give them a cool room, at least in the evening — perhaps on a cool windowsill where there's lots of elbow room so foliage isn't touching cold glass panes.

If house temperatures drop five degrees at night, so much the better.

To increase lifespans try to raise humidity. Stand pots on saucers of moist gravel or group together — the vapor emitted by their leaves creates a moister atmosphere — but leave space between them for light and ventilation.

Personally, I think plants grow better when grouped than if isolated.

Do allow for proper drainage by removing the foil wrap around their pots or by punching holes in the bottom of the foil.

The Poinsettia, harbinger of Christmas, looks equally splendid on a table or suspended in the air.

Massing several on a raised platform in a basket gives a striking display. A large one is shown off to great advantage when placed in a low position on the floor.

This native of Mexico likes bright light, monthly feeding, an occasional misting, and a drink when soil surface is dry to the touch.

They dislike drafts and being close to heat sources. The showy bracts (they surround the actual insignificant yellow flower in the centre) will last longer in a room that's not overheated.

The easy-going Christmas Cactus is a favorite holiday plant because it can be kept happy in rooms that we're comfortable in, and with proper care, will thrive for many years.

It isn't a desert cactus, so keep the soil evenly moist — not wet — and don't allow it to totally dry out. Insects rarely bug this one.

The splashes of color from drooping flowers in a mature plant can be set off splendidly flying high in a hanging basket while a small one can sit nicely on a table, shelf or draft-free, brightly-lit windowsill.

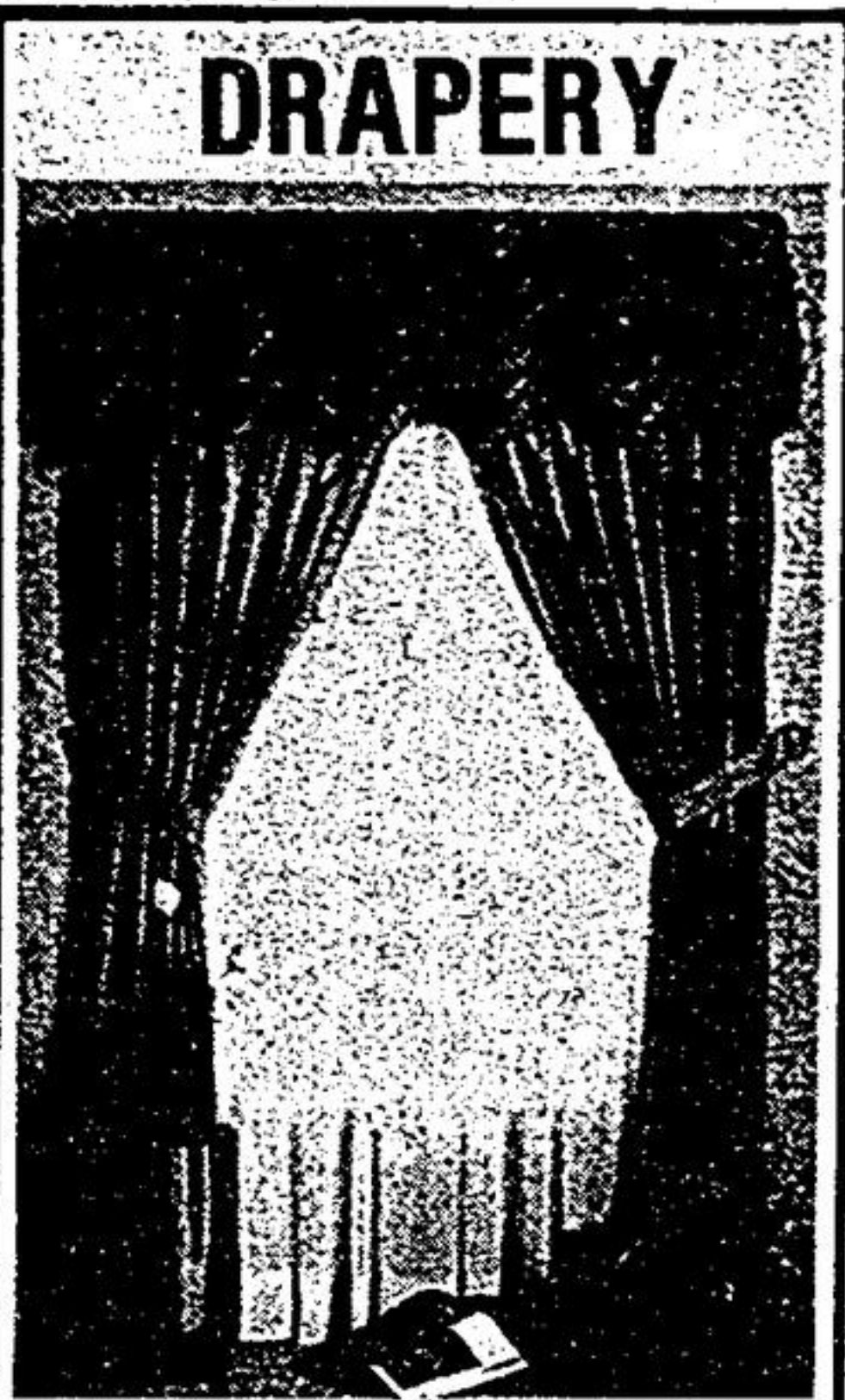
Move it father back from the window in summer so leaves aren't sunburned.

It does have a disappointing habit though. If the direction of light is changed (even a quarter-turn of the container may do it) promising buds could be lost.

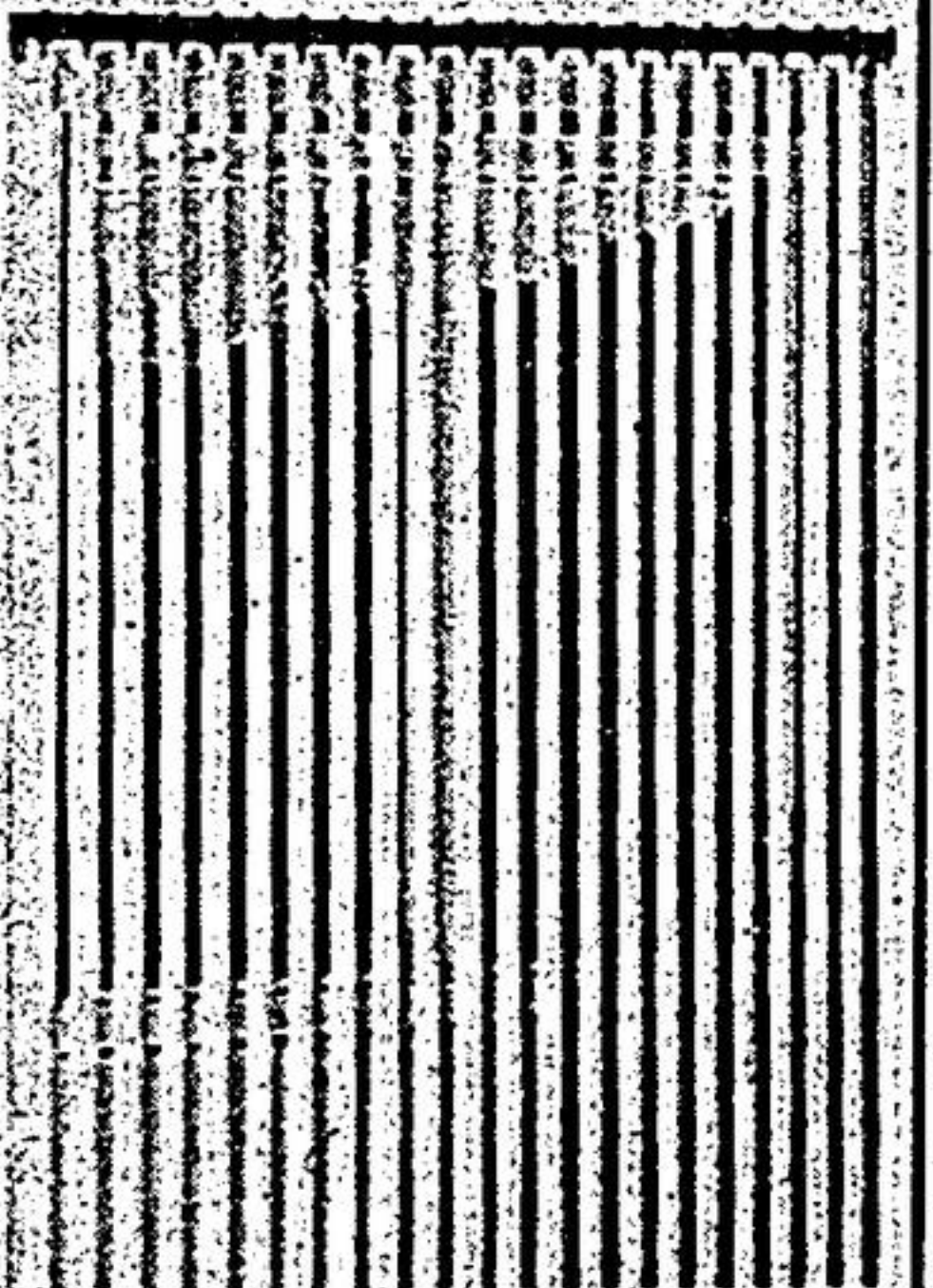
The Hoya (Wax Plant/Porcelain Flower) will drop buds for the same reason, too.

Upgrading of pot size is only done if roots fill the pot. If the plant doesn't have cramped feet, clean the original container and place it back in with fresh soil.

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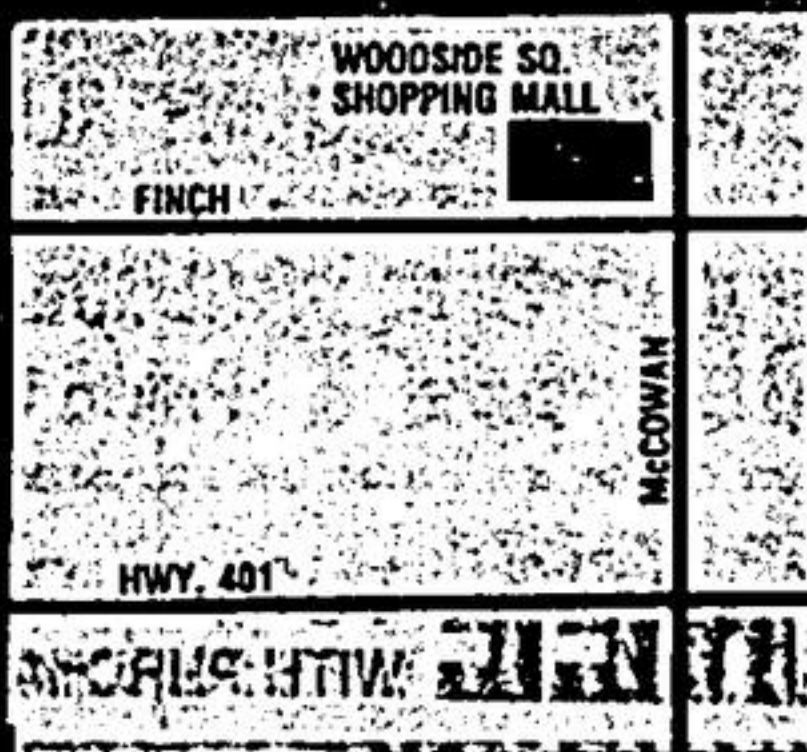
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