

Winter's arrival puts focus on indoor plants

Now that we've had our first substantial snowfall, let's turn our attention indoors to the plants that we nourish through the winter. These plants nurture us as well — both psychologically and physically.

Green plants remove many toxins from the air inside our homes — it is recommended that the average size house should contain at least 30 plants. And of course, the best way to view a winter blizzard is

through a window filled with flowers. All plants have similar requirements — light, heat, humidity, water and food, but the amounts vary depending on the species. For the next two to three months, even plants which normally require shade can reside in your 'sunniest' window.

Usual household temperatures — 68 to 72 degrees F. by day and 63-68 degrees F. at night are adequate for most plants. They

all prefer a five-degree drop at night. In order to perform well next year, some plants need a complete rest now with temperatures as low as 50 degrees F. in a brightly lit room — clivia, cactus and succulent plants such as hoya. Other plants such as my new coleus collection and gesneriads (African violets, streptocarpus and streptocarpella) must not go below 60 degrees F.

Because plants are not growing vigorously, they need watering and feeding less. Water thoroughly only when the soil surface is dry and do not let plants in water (an exception are overwintering pond

tropicals such as papyrus which must have wet feet.)

All plants need higher humidity than is usually available. Group your plants together so that as each one transpires its neighbours benefit.

Good air circulation is essential to prevent mildew spores from settling and growing on susceptible plants — begonias and gesneriads. Small fans situated in large plant



Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason Hogue

groupings is a good idea. Note that icy cold draughts could be very detrimental. If you have brought plants in from outdoors and they have lost bottom leaves and are looking straggly, cut them well back. This will promote the growth of healthy new shoots from the bottom.

Jo Ann wonders how to keep her streptocarpus healthy and blooming. This gesneriad (same family as African violets) needs bright light, warm temperatures, high humidity but good air circulation and even soil moisture (no wilting or wet feet).

To prevent build up of salts in the soil, water from the top until the excess runs out the drainage holes. Water must be lukewarm and should not be splashed onto the leaves. Drops of cold water sitting on foliage causes spots to develop. After a flush of bloom these plants take a rest.

This is when repotting should be done if a plant has outgrown its space. Use a shallow pot with drainage holes and soil recommended for African violets.

Josephine's hoya has refused to bloom for several years. Like other succulents, hoya need a cool, dry winter rest (perhaps hung in a window behind drapes where it will get bright light but not benefit from the heat of the room).

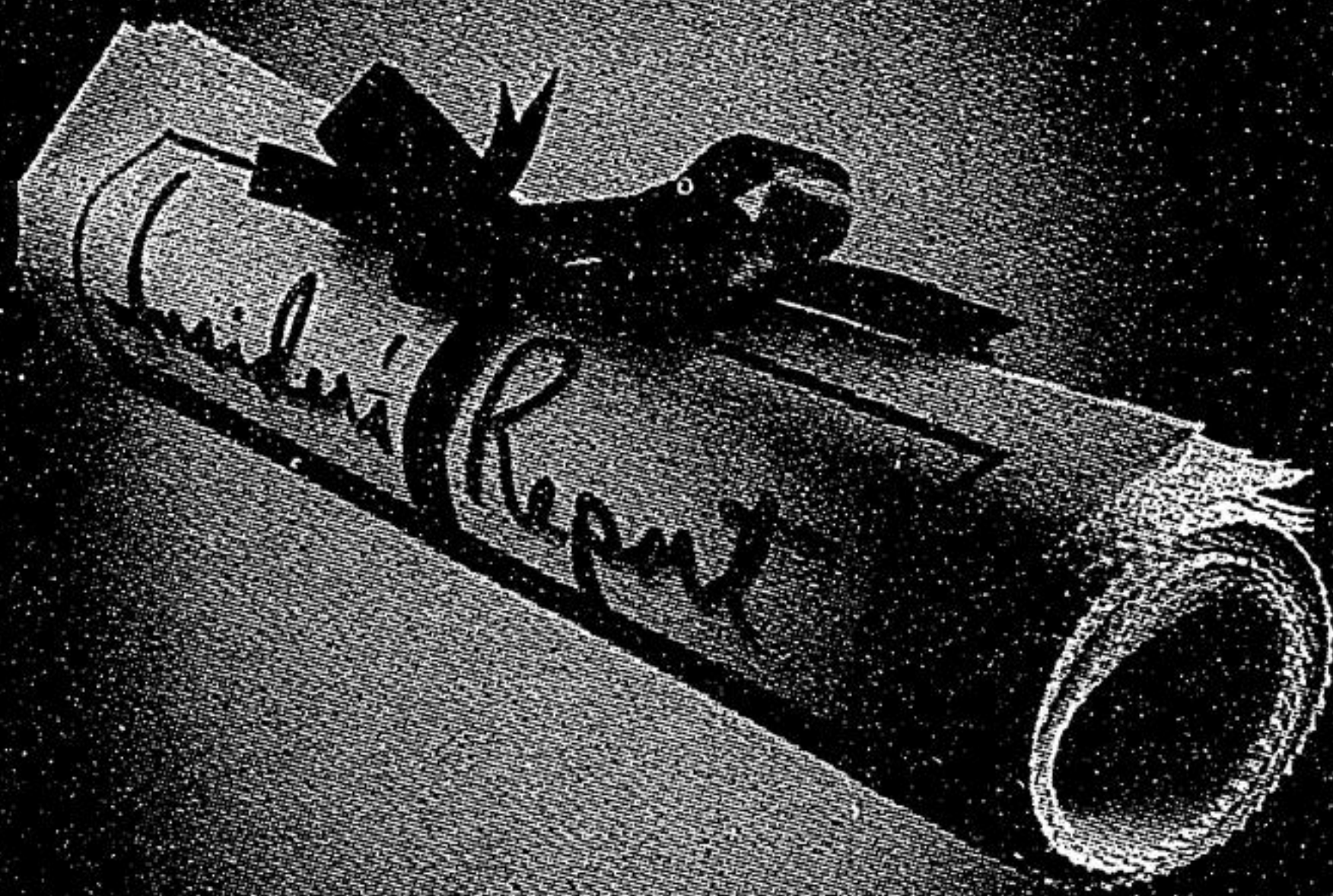
If you must repot a hoyo use a soil mix suitable for cactus or add sand to your general mix.

Hoya must not be potbound in order to flower. Do not cut off the long trailing stems as these will be the location of the flower buds. Never 'deadhead' a hoyo after blooming as it will flower again from the same place.

Send your questions or comments to:

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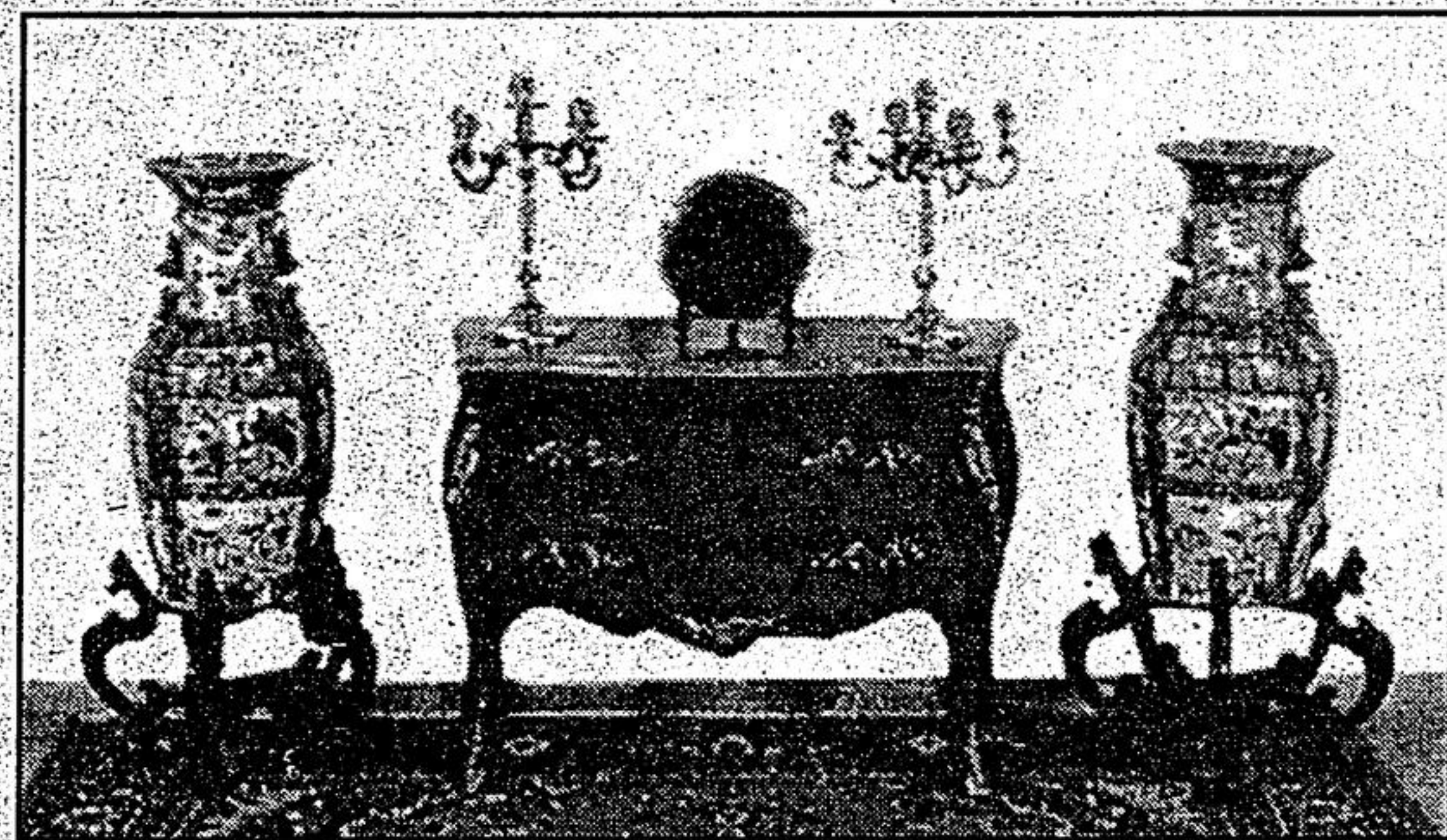
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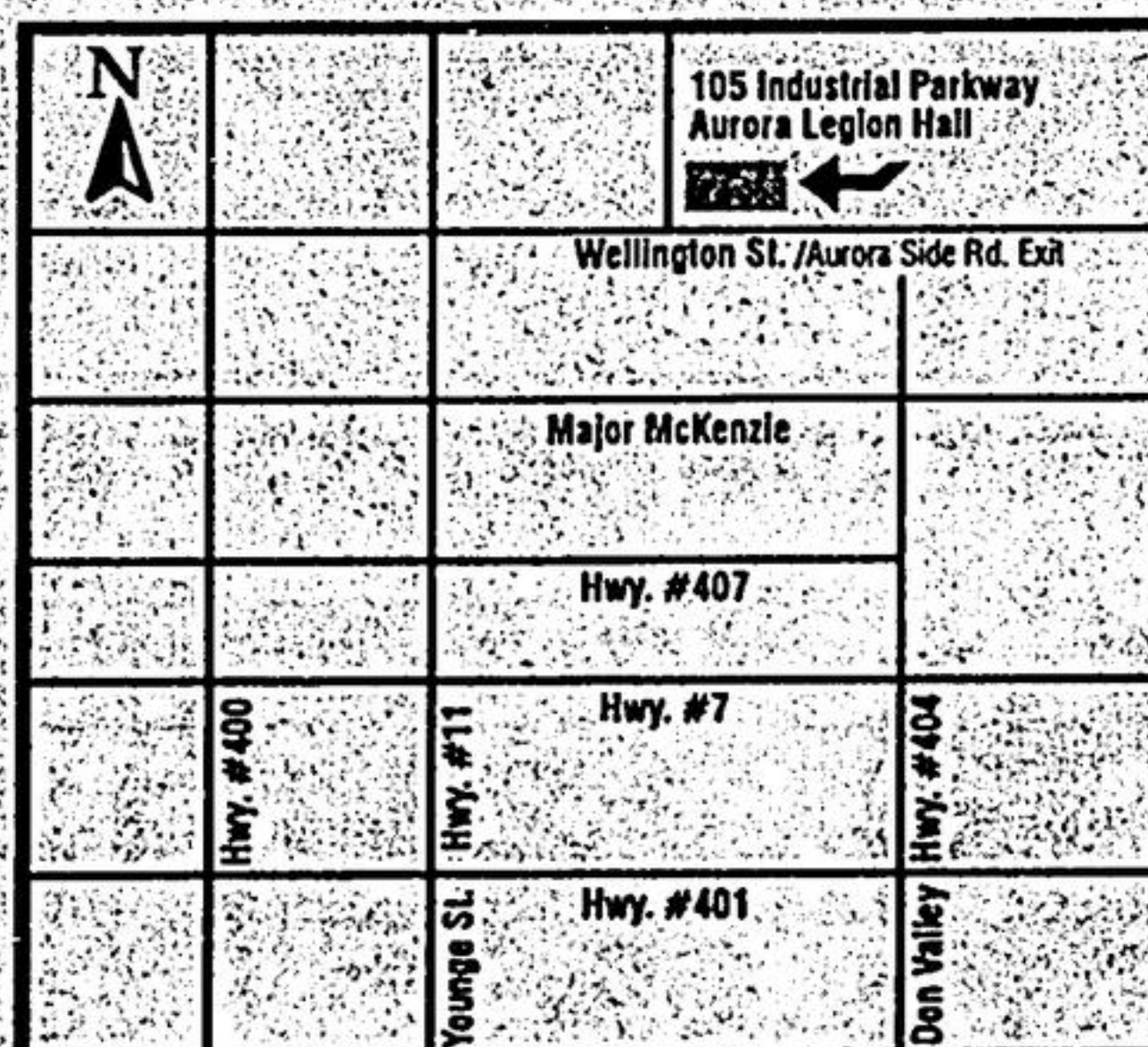
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