

Gardening Letters

To begin with, let me clarify something I wrote last month about mulching. There is no question that mulch is a great thing for helping plants get through the winter, however.....

The success of different mulches seems to depend on their physical properties. Straw is an ideal mulch because it traps a lot of air in between the straw pieces, we have put approximately one foot of straw over tender plants to help them survive the winter. Peat moss also makes a good winter mulch because it too traps a lot of air between its fibre pieces. The 'however' comes next though, peat makes a terrible summer mulch. It absorbs a lot of water (something like 40 times its own weight), once dried out, the waxy covering on each fibre does not like to be soaked again, it forms a crust on top of the plants refusing to let water or air through to the ground. In short, if you use peat as a winter mulch, then you have to work it into the ground in the spring, you can not leave it on the ground as a summer weed mulch as well.

Moving on to better news, the 1989 Handbook for Selecting Roses is now available through the American Rose Society. Its a pocket sized handbook which lists over 1000 roses. The alphabetical listing provides horticultural classifications, and colour classifications along with the numerical rating given each rose to illustrate how well it grows. Its a real deal because it only costs \$1.00 and its available from the American Rose Society, Box 30,000, Shreveport, LA, 71130-0030, USA. You have to send them a self addressed envelope. Please include extra money for postage.

Some of you may have seen TLC...for plants. This is a new Canadian magazine dealing strictly with the Canadian plant and garden world. The articles tend to be fairly short and easily read and each issue covers something for everyone, from the garden to the african violet. Its \$12.95 for one year (4 issues). Subscriptions may be ordered from Gardenvale Publishing Co. 1 Pacific, Ste-Anne de Bellevue, Quebec, H9X 9Z9.

We trialed a product called 'Spray N Grow' this summer in our garden. This liquid is an enzyme, minor nutrient based spray that is supposed to lead to miraculous growth rates and increased yields in the average garden. Don't waste your money unless you garden in sterilized and seriously depleted soils. For my money, a load of compost or manure would do the job just as well. I split our crops into two groups, the trial group and the control or no-spray group. The tomatoes showed no difference, the cabbage showed no difference, an ailing Ohio Buckeye Chestnut tree threw out some new leaves a week after being sprayed and may be healthier. I also sprayed it on our poinsettia crop in the greenhouse as we use artificial soil which does not contain trace minerals and if its going to work, it will work here. So far, I can't tell the sprayed pots from the non-sprayed pots but the poinsettia crop is not finished yet. Test results then indicate if you have an ailing Ohio Buckeye Chestnut tree, spray it with Spray N Grow, otherwise get a spreader load of manure or compost.

Speaking test results, we had our annual tomato taste testing group go to work and we have the taste results of 19 different varieties of tomatoes. Besides having a great time, we surprised ourselves with the results. It may surprise you next month too when I give you the results.



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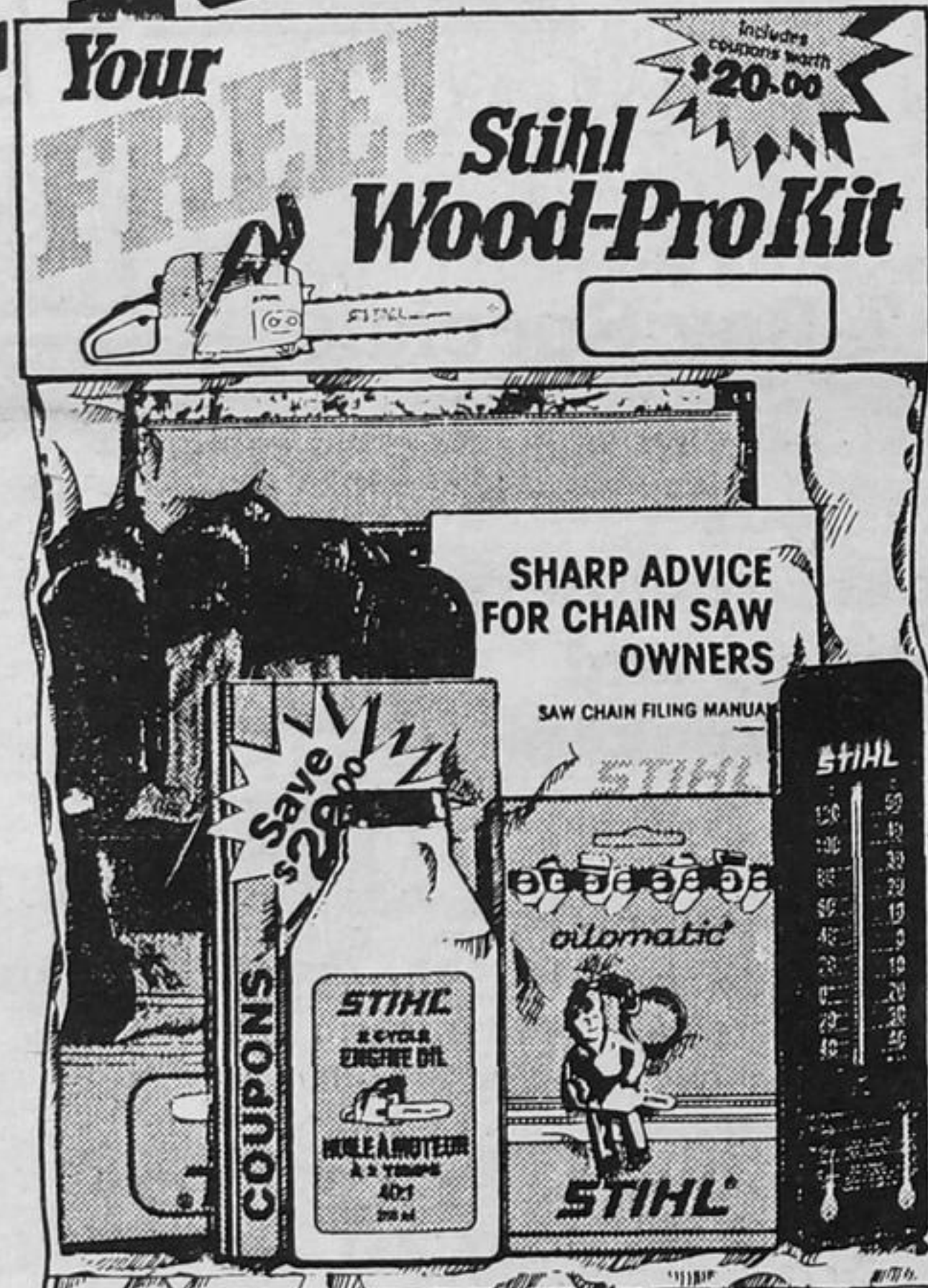
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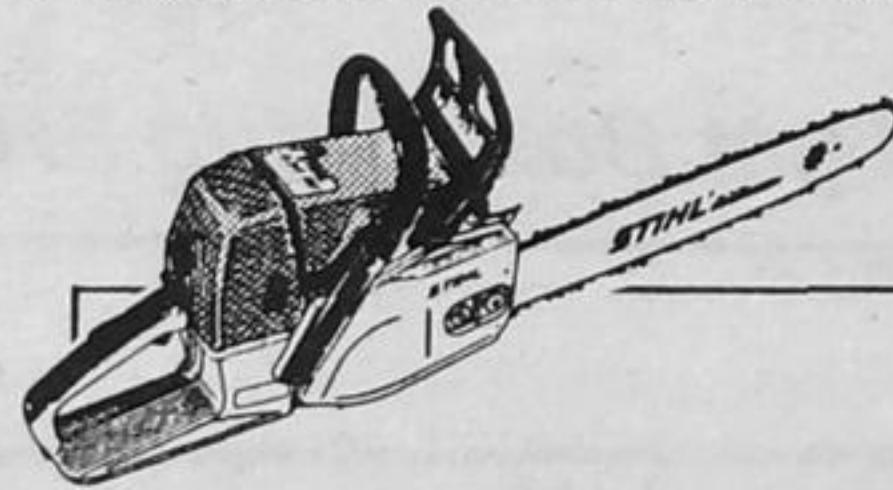
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