

the pits

NEWSLETTER

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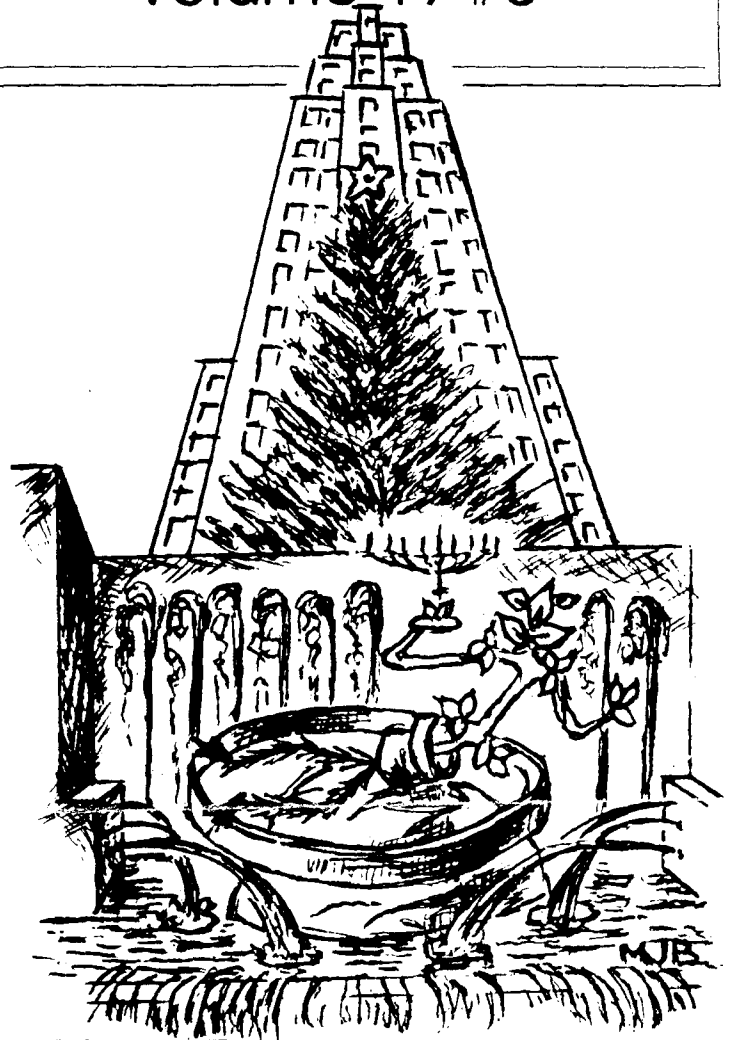
WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Cape gooseberry, Canistel, Carambola, Cherimoya, Bitter melon, Ethrog, Feijoa, Guava, Figs, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Malanga, Mango, Name, Papaya, Passion fruit, Persimmon, Pomegranate, Pomelo (red), Prickly pear (pads & fruit), Quince, Tamarillo (orange and red varieties) Taro, and Water Chestnuts, White Sapote. Make sure the figs are imported from Turkey. Local varieties are sterile.

SEEDS

This month Bob is offering Bitter melon seeds harvested from his own plants, Tamarillo and Dwarf Papaya. Bitter melon makes a wonderful hanging baskets. Bob also requests that you send sturdy envelopes.

If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council.



No Hothouse For This Flower

The sacred lotus, which Buddhists and Hindus have revered for centuries, has the remarkable ability to regulate its temperature, just as humans and other warm-blooded animals do, according to a study in the current issue of the journal Nature. Researchers discovered that lotus flowers can hold a temperature of 88 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit even when the air temperature drops to 50 degrees. Like a shivering animal, a blossom burns off carbohydrates to keep warm, cranking away at one watt. Forty blooms can generate the heat of a living-room light bulb; 70 give off the warmth of a human being at rest reading a newspaper. Scientists suspect the flowers heat up to lure their cold-blooded insect pollinators.

CAROL KAESUK YOON



The Lotus smells good, too.

NEW YORK TIMES!

What about our lowly skunk cabbage. Waldo Shmedlap wrote an hysterical article about heating a greenhouse with skunk cabbage.

I suspect there are lots of other winter blooming plants that have this same phenomenon. If you can think of any others - send them along.

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

17 Circuit Ave. Scituate, MA 02066

Gifts for Gardeners

The plants are in, the gardens are clipped and the boats are hauled and it is time to plan for the holidays. We are always looking for something new and different- this year we hit a mother-lode.

1. Available separately 2-hour cassette tape or video tape of SealSkinz socks in most sizes.
2. The MVT™ version alone progresses to create, but prevents water from entering.
3. In some cases of SealSkinz™ socks progress from the skin.



Our first gift is very utilitarian and not the least bit glamorous-**SOCKS!**

SealSkinz

Waterproof MVT Socks DuPont, 1002 Industrial Rd. Old Hickory, TN 37138

Have you ever shoveled snow or accidentally hopped in a snowbank and come out with dry feet? Or as in our recent case, hauled a boat out of the water and not filled your boots with water. We gave this product the acid test a few days ago when Dr. John had to pull our dingy out of the water in a pair of leaky Wellies. His boots filled up immediately but his feet remained warm and dry thanks to SealSkinz. These socks are not cheap, we paid \$26.95 for one pair.

There is something new under the sun, for gardeners: CD ROMs (This stands for compact disk, read only memory). They divide into two groups: encyclopedias that have large lists of plants, with pictures and descriptions and CAD (computer- assisted drawing) that are graphic landscape design programs. The latter are for gardeners with a thorough knowledge of computers and graphics. We will restrict ourselves to the encyclopedias.

CD ROMs are huge programs and require a moderately sophisticated computer. They hold an enormous amount of information: 650 MB (Megabytes) versus 1.44 MB on a typical 3 ½ inch. By my math a CD ROM holds 451 times more information than a floppy disk. Be sure to check out the requirements on the outside of

the package before purchasing any of these. All PCs require a CD ROM drive, a minimum of 8 MB hard drive, a VGA color card, a sound card, and Windows 3.1 or "95".. It has been my experience that a program requiring 8 MB of RAM (random access memory) to run, really needs 16 MB. Yes they will run, but your whole machine will be as slow as molasses. Computers this powerful operate through a 486 or Pentium chip. Those programs for Macintosh requirements are a 8 MB, 68030 CPU and 640 x 480 monitor. Most important, check the box to see if it is for Mac. or Windows.

If you do not own a computer or have a friend or relative with a computer, skip this section. Space is too limited to explain, RAM, Pentium, ROM, MB, megahertz, sound card and VGA color monitor. If, however, you are thinking of buying a computer, look at the system requirements, they are a good guide. As Dr. John says, "A woman can never be too thin, have too much money or too much memory (in her computer)." Too much, ain't enough.

How these gardening encyclopedias were evaluated:

1. Ease of use. Most are so simple they do not need a manual.
2. What regions are covered in the database. Most gardening encyclopedias are aimed at the temperate regions of USDA zones 5b - 8a and give short shrift to Florida, the Gulf States and the West Coast. I divided the country into 5 regions, Northeast-Midwest, Southeast, Florida, Gulf States and West Coast and checked the regions by searching for 5 basic landscape and native plants from each area. For example, I checked the West Coast asking for Summer Lilac, (*Ceanothus spp.*), Manzanita, (*Archtostryphalos spp.*) and Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*).

3. Sophistication. I searched for some of my favorite plants (all are available, but

pg. 2.

under-used). Some examples of my search are: Pride of Madeira (*Echium fastuosum*), Lion's Tail (*Leontis*) and my favorite ground cover *Staphanandra crispa* (no common name).

4. Pits! This is of course our favorite.

5. Presentation: Depth of material or useful information, photography, and the quality of or annoyance of bells and whistles.

Listing alphabetically:

Complete Gardening: by Microsoft
Available most computer supply stores.

Three stars for ease of use, presentation of material and sophistication.

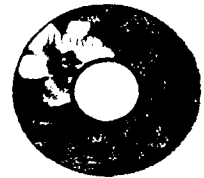
Complete Gardening is a glitzy, program with a huge database. It passed the sophisticated Northeast and Midwest plants with flying colors. It flunked Pits, and the other 4 regions. However, it has a lot going for it. There are five sections to wander around in: **Garden Tours** with video clips of public gardens in the 5 regions, these were very interesting; **The Media Garden**, video tips on common chores such as planting a hanging basket or pruning roses; **Techniques**, printed text on such chores as establishing and caring for lawns; **Plant Problems** text and pictures of common pests, diseases and soil amendments; and **Encyclopedia of Garden Plants**. The photographs and plant information are very good. There is an audio pronouncing capability for those of us who's Latin is a little *shaky*. For a northern gardener, this is a wonderful program for the money.

Personally, I am offended by the constant strains of elevator jazz that play in the background as you switch from one section to another- my musical tastes are limited to the 19th century and I don't like any kind of music when I work.

Garden Encyclopedia: Books that Work

PO Box 3201, Salinas, CA 9891 \$59.95

One star for ease of use. This was our most disappointing program. The database is small and limited to very common plants in zones 5-8. No pits to speak of. However, has the best list making ability of all the programs. You can ask it to list pink blooming annuals for summer, and with one click of the mouse - up comes your list. It was small and included some plants that were not pink. Culturally information was adequate for a beginning gardener, but of no value for reference material..



Hortiscopia , Annuals and Perennials \$89.95

Hortiscopia Trees and Shrubs \$149.95

Desops Ltd., Box 1200
Purcellville, VA 22132

Four stars for regions represented, sophistication, pits and presentation.

However it is not the easiest program to use.

If I had to make one selection to take to a desert island, it would be these two programs. However, there better be plenty of electricity on the island - they are huge programs! Both rare and native plants of all regions are well represented. The one omission I found was beach plum (*Prunus maritima*), the pride of all New England jelly makers. Perhaps I shall send their editor a jar.

The amount of information far exceeds any of my written encyclopedias. The data for each plant is divided into 4 index card-like sections; **Preview** has at least 1 picture of the plant and usually more including, leaf, flower, and the landscape use. **Information**, includes such vital stats as height and width, origins, special features such as interesting bark or fruit, **Zone** is a map of the entire country showing where the plant grows and **Notes** includes culture, pests and diseases, leaf identification and a space

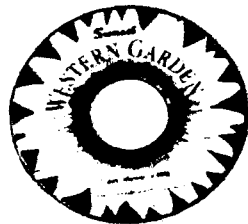
p. 7. 4.

for personal notes. Unlike the other programs, there is real writing with mouth watering descriptions.

These are very big and powerful programs but they are well worth the extra money to buy and the time to master them.

Sunset Western Garden \$49.95

80 Willow Rd. Menlo Park CA 94025



Three stars for ease of use, regions covered and pits.

Sunset was one of the first disks we acquired and it remains one of our favorites. It passes the Pits with flying colors, and has a good selection of plants for the warmer regions of the country. The data base is limited to those plants that grow on the West Coast, many of these plants, however, overlap with the plants of the South and other parts of the country.

A warning about zones. Sunset has its own zone system that has 24 zones based on a wide variety of growing conditions. The USDA map is based on minimum and maximum cold temperatures, Sunset's system takes into account such varying conditions, e.g. maritime, desert, rainfall, temperature, sunlight etc. For example hawthorns (*Crataegus spp.*) are listed as zones 1-11 and 14-17. This is Greek to

anyone not familiar with the system and unfortunately they do not adequately explain this system on the CD. However, zones are not so important for those of us growing Pits in the house.

The Sunset Western Garden has a pronouncing program, video tapes of common chores that are helpful. For the indoor Pit and plant grower, this program is the best for the money.

Sunset also has a garden problem solver that we have found useful.

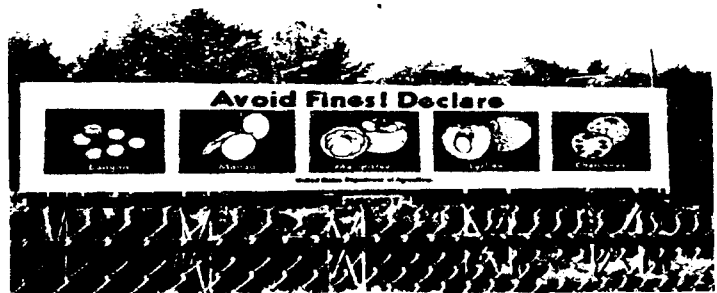
You will not find wonderful words such as Michael Dirr's description of *Poncirus trifoliata*, "...because of its dense growth and thorny character; even a dumb football player would not attempt to penetrate this hedge!" Or such lyrical descriptions as Tovah Martin's "Deep inside, most folks yearn for a bougainvillea. Who wouldn't love to host a pot or two of those graceful flowering vines wending their way between the window panes.."

The text in CD ROMs tends to be terse and utilitarian. The pictures, however, are something else again. They range in quality from good to gorgeous. And if you are a gardener who likes to see what you are reading about before you buy it, one of these programs is for you. ! May be its an excuse to get a PC and join the 21st century.

NOTES FROM WASHINGTON STATE



Chris tending his Pits overlooking Mercer Is.



Sign on the Canadian Border

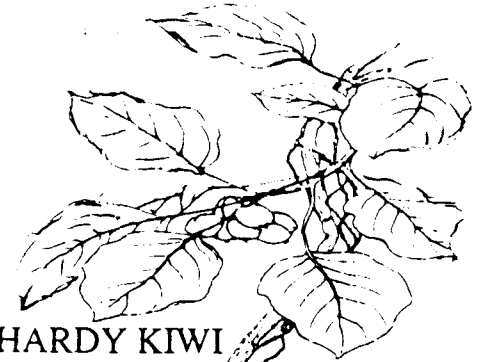
"..what happens if you DO declare mangosteens or cherimoyas, are they confiscated or are you summarily shot and a fine levied against your estate... Chris Carrdus

RARE FRUITS FOR NORTHERN GARDENS

January is the month to dream of next year's garden. Here are some tropical tasting fruits for northern climates and some catalogs that carry them.



ASIAN PEAR
Pyrus pyrifolia
Zone 5-8
Height ca 30'
Origin - hybrid
A very large tree that needs plenty of room.



HARDY KIWI
Actinidia arguta, A. isai, A. kolomitka
Vigorous vines up to 40'

A. arguta: requires male & female for fruit.
A. kolomitka: requires male & female
New foliage on male is tri-colored
A. Isai: Japanese self fertilizing hybrid. Bear within a year.

MAYPOP
Passiflora incarnata
Zone 6b - 9

A vigorous deciduous vine.
Elegant blue & purple flowers.
Edible yellow fruit if pollinated

HARDY ORANGE
Poncirus trifoliata
Zone - 6-9b
Height - 4'

A very thorny shrub that can form and impenetrable hedge.
Lovely fragrant flowers in spring
bright orange inedible fruits in fall.



PAWPAW
Asimina triloba
Zone 4-9
Height 15'

Lovely small tree with a rounded crown. For the best pollination plant 2.
The only hardy member of cherimoya family.

Catalogs

Camellia Forest
Box 291
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Edible Landscaping
PO Box 77
Afton, VA 22920

Gossler Farms
1200 Weaver Rd
Springfield OR 97478

Greer Gardens
1280 Goodpasture Is. Rd.
Eugene OR 97478

Miller Nurseries
50760 w. Lake Rd.
Canandaigua NY 14424

Oregon Exotics
165C Messenger Rd.
Grants Pass

Raintree Nursery
391 Butts Rd
Morton WA 98356

Woodlanders Inc.
1128 Colleton Ave
Aiken SC 29801

Pit of the Moment

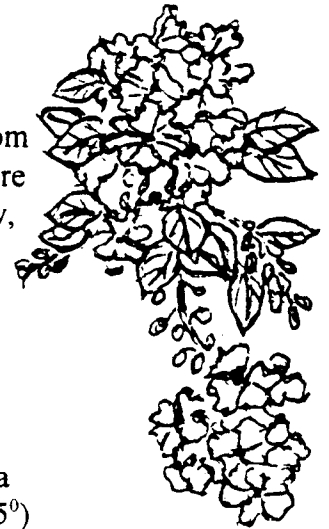
A nurseryman friend of ours, Alan Haskell, said the dumbest question you can ask a horticulturalist is: "What is your favorite plant?" Obviously, the one that's doing its thing at the time you ask. Right now my Golden Dew Drop (*Duranta repens*) is doing its thing. It has spikes of pale Alice-blue flowers and clusters of pale yellow dewdrop shaped fruits. The combination of pale blue and yellow is an enchanting site.

Golden Dewdrop is a woody shrub with a weeping habit of growth. Gail Egol has seen it grown as a hanging basket. It is native to Florida and the east coast of South America. My sister Jean introduced me to the plant seven years ago. She got hers through the Sarasota Fruit and Nut Society - a chapter of the Rare Fruit International. It is stretching things to call this a rare fruit. Tanaka in his Cyclopedia of the Edible Plants of the World, claims it is eaten by the natives in Brazil. Joy Martin, the proprietor

of Logees Greenhouses, and I ate some berries from their specimen. They were pretty tasteless and mealy, but obviously not poisonous.

I lost my original plant years ago and was unable to find a source until I went to Logees. I grow mine in full sun in a moderately cool (55° - 75°) greenhouse. Prior to that I used to grow it on a sunny southern window in my house in New York. It seems to be resistant to the pests that plague my greenhouse, white fly and mealy bug, and my lackadaisical watering habits.

This is not an honest-to-goodness pit, but it is a delightful, carefree and free-flowering and fruiting little plant. I have 5 orchids in bloom and this plant gives me more pleasure than all of them. It can be purchased by mail order from Logees Greenhouses 141 North St, Danielson CT 06239. If enough people are interested I will harvest some seed. Just write to Bob Jurgens.



Book Review

The Complete Handbook of Garden Plants by Michael Wright published by Facts on File is one of the most compact and comprehensive handbooks we have seen. We do not ordinarily review books published in 1984 because they may be difficult to obtain but our local book seller obtained a copy for us in just one week. The price is \$ 24.95 but higher in Canada. It is well organized by plant type (eg. Trees and shrubs, perennial climbers, etc.) and by botanic family, a feature we like. There are thumb nail descriptions of hardiness, size, flower, leaf type of 2500 plants. This not a good plant identification book but it is illustrated by water color drawings which are frequently superior to photographs. A feature we did not admire was a departure

from the traditional USDA hardiness zones. He appears to have linked zone 5 and 6 among other things.



English writers frequently give short shrift to some North American plants but no "complete" handbook can be excused for omitting the southern live oak, *Quercus virginiana* from its contents. I assume but did not find similar omissions of plants from the south and west. Two other carping comments. 1. The index is quite brief so that for example *Quercus* is indexed but not the species or varieties of Oak listed in the text. 2. The print is very small. If you are over 50 bring your specs.

John Hart

pg. 7.



NOTES IN PASSING

It is **bulb planting** time here in Scituate MA. Water rats come out of the seawall try to build their winter lairs in our gardens. The soil is soft and moist and very tempting. We have two ways of discouraging them. To prevent nesting; we plant one *Fritillaria imperialis* in each garden bed These bulbs have a strong aroma of skunk.. To prevent noshing, we put a moth ball in each tulip hole (daffodils and crocus are poisonous and they do not eat them. are not a temptation).

Don't forget to add a shot of gin to the soil or pebbles for **paper whites**. One shot is just enough to stunt their growth and prevent them from flopping over when they

bloom. They will also be stronger and sturdier if (after you have potted them) you put them in a very cool dark place for a week. The cool and dark stimulate root growth.

Now is the time to apply **anti-desiccant** to all broad-leaved evergreens. This is a non-toxic substance that prevents winter sun-scorch and wind burn. Choose a day when the temperature is no lower than 45° and spray the leaves. Anti-desiccant is frequently sold under the name of "Wilt-Proof".

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PITS CROSSWORD

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