

VILLAGE VIEW

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While the blustery winds of January batter at doors, and the come-again storms of February pile snow higher along the roadside, keeping alive little pieces of summer helps everyone make it through 'til spring.

That's why pots of geraniums bloom on kitchen windowsills. It's the reason African violets enjoy unflagging popularity. It explains why late winter finds New Englanders pruning their forsythia bushes. Those lifeless-looking stems will burst into bright yellow sprays soon after being brought into a warm house.

Some wintertime gardeners become so enthusiastic about houseplants they find themselves growing shelves of them under florescent lamps in their basements. African violets respond particularly well to artificial light, and the colors and forms developed over the years give violet lovers a practically endless variety. Every shade of purple, blue, pink, and white is found, and their leaves vary from deepest to palest greens with some plain, some ruffled, some touched with color or white.

Even more dedicated groups of plant-growers have added greenhouses to their homes; in these garden rooms, it's summer all year 'round. This isn't a new development. Roman emperors with a taste for fresh oranges were among earlier builders of greenhouses; the practice spread throughout Europe and continued into the present century.

In this country, greenhouses have been used primarily by commercial growers, but recent recognition that when attached to homes greenhouses can save fuel has created new interest among energy-conscious homeowners who are also plant-lovers.

Properly constructed, a greenhouse forms a "heat sink" that absorbs warmth from the sun during the day and releases it at night as adjoining areas of the house cool down. While a greenhouse is no substitute for a heating system, it can work well as a supplemental heat source.

To encourage Americans to take all possible steps to conserve fuel, the government offers tax credits to those who add greenhouses to their houses. Although the initial investment is not inconsiderable, the tax credits provide a real incentive to go ahead with greenhouse plans, particularly for those contemplating such a move as much for the pleasure as for the profit.

Many tropical plants survive as houseplants during Cape Cod winters, but because most homes lack the humid atmosphere tropics need to do their best, they do not truly thrive. In a greenhouse, however, they respond beautifully to even temperatures, high humidity, and light conditions to which they are best suited.

Such plants as camellias, gardenias, hibiscus, and even rare orchids will reward you with handsome blossoms and vigorous growth in a greenhouse. Duplicating a tropical environment without a greenhouse is too difficult for most house-plant lovers, so they settle for Swedish ivy, philodendron, and an occasional pot of cyclamen to brighten a holiday season.

Among plants that grow outdoors in the tropics and that make interesting specimens raised in home greenhouses is the Natal Plum or the *Carissa grandiflora*. This evergreen shrub can be pruned heavily to maintain its shape; it may be trained as a hedge, espaliered, used as ground cover, or grown as a single plant. Its spiny stems are thickly covered with shiny dark-green foliage, and it bears snow-white star-shaped flowers. As its common name implies, the fruit is a dark pink (inedible) plum.

Hibiscus comes in several forms; some are perennial, some deciduous, some evergreen. *H. huegellii*, an evergreen compact shrub, requires only occasional pinching to keep it in shape. *H. rosasinensis* originates in China and produces showy flowers on new wood; old stems should be pruned out regularly. A particularly pretty member of the hibiscus family has variegated leaves of green, white, and pink, and a pink or salmon-colored blossom three inches in diameter.

Gardenias are specimen plants that add fragrance to the greenhouse. They respond well to pruning and shaping and can easily be kept to optimum size. Best flowering results are obtained with plants held to 30 inches. Flower clusters should

be removed as they fade.

Camellias, favorites for their showy scentless blossoms, lend themselves to bonsai, dwarfing and espaliering. A camellia should be trained when very young and continuously controlled and shaped throughout its life. To keep it producing blooms season after season, prune off a quarter of its outer roots every six months.

If a trouble-free flowering vine is exactly what you'd like growing in one corner of your greenhouse, you might choose the *Allamanda cathartica*. Its flowers are bright yellow trumpets, up to three inches long and nearly as wide. Unlike many vines, Allamanda has no thorns nor ivy-like footholds; plan some sort of trellis to help support its long graceful shoots.

A shrub often chosen to provide constant color is the Croton; it will grow to eight feet if permitted to achieve full height, but can be trimmed or pinched to keep it within bounds. Croton leaves are brightly colored and range from dark green with brilliant red veins to shades of yellow and orange with deep green veins. Some bear foliage with wavy edges, some smooth. Some have leaves that twist and curl like egg noodles. Some bear long and narrow leaves; others short and broad with deep lobes. No tropical greenhouse garden is really complete without a few croton plants.

Most plants mentioned here will grow in any well-drained neutral garden soil. Gardenia, camellia, and most orchids prefer slightly acid soils.

Should you happen to be among those foresighted homeowners on Cape Cod who realize that the current oil glut is a temporary reprieve from a world-wide shortage, and should you be thinking about taking advantage of the energy tax credits available on your 1982 tax return, this year may be the best possible time to invest in your own home greenhouse.

You'll want it placed to take advantage of the sun's warming rays. It should have a heat-absorbing floor and foundation to provide your home with the energy-savings that can help pay for the pleasure of your greenhouse. It will need a sturdy framework, good insulation, and a plan that permits movement of air between it and your house. Plan, too, for outside ventilation during summer months. You'll need a water supply, good drainage, and a heat source in case of prolonged periods of cloudy cold days.

A home greenhouse is not inexpensive nor is it an addition that, once installed, takes care of itself. Keeping plants healthy can be very time-consuming. For garden-lovers, though, a greenhouse brings a summer atmosphere to these long winter months.

If having your own greenhouse is something you've always dreamed about, perhaps this is the year to make that particular dream a reality.