

HOME & GARDEN

Public accepts conservation

By BARBARA MAYER
AP Newsfeatures

Home energy conservation isn't making headlines any more.

But, according to one energy researcher, that is a good sign. "When a subject makes news, it isn't being done; when it stops making news, it is being done," said Herbert Mertz.

Mertz is a former researcher at Princeton University's Center for Energy and Environmental Studies and is president of Princeton Energy Partners, a home energy consulting firm. He says the level of public interest, awareness and acceptance of conservation, has taken a definite upward turn since the subject first got widespread attention several years ago.

"People are doing conservation now; builders are more aware of energy problems and new housing tends to be less leaky than it used to be." Also on the upswing are a maze of new products, some of which are less than useful, he added.

The time gap between energy analysis or installation of some new device and the reality of the savings makes it easy for misinformation and unrealistic expectations to develop. Consequently Mertz suggested consumers look at product claims very carefully and ask for specifics on product tests before spending their money.

Cyclamen houseplant worth extra effort

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

Someone I once met complained to me that cyclamen was not a very popular houseplant in the U.S. She had been raised in Europe where it was quite common. Perhaps one reason Americans have not widely cultivated the cyclamen is because in the past our houses have often been overheated; cyclamen prefer cooler temperatures — between 50 and 60 degrees.

The cyclamen family has many beautiful plants. The blossoms have been described as looking like butterflies perched on a slender stem. As pleasant as it is to have a jungle of easy care greenery, sometimes it is fun to try your hand at growing an extravagantly beautiful plant that might have a reputation for being a little bit difficult or temperamental. The cyclamen is so lovely and blooms for a long enough time during the dark winter days that I think it is worth the extra trouble.

Cyclamen originated in the mountainous regions of Iran and they bloom when the days are bright and cool and the nights are cold. If you buy a plant from a florist in bloom or about to bloom, it will be used to greenhouse temperatures. Let it get used to lower temperatures gradually. Keep it in a warmer room at first and then move it to a cooler room. With

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people economizing as much as they can on heating costs, many homes will now be more hospitable to the cyclamen. They prefer cool temperatures and a 10 degree drop at night is very important. They need light but not direct sun so an east window is an ideal location.

Besides cool temperatures and bright light, cyclamen require high humidity and they need a fair amount of water. If deprived they will quickly wilt. On the other hand, they should not be overwatered or the corm will rot. Be careful not to water the center of the plant, put the water in around the edge of the pot.

With proper care a cyclamen can remain in bloom from Christmas through April, but during that period flowers and leaves will die and have to be removed. Do not cut them off; pull them off by twisting and then pulling away the fleshy stalk. This way you will avoid damaging the corm.

When the plant has finally finished blooming you may want to try and carry it over for another season. To do this, the corm must first be cured. Stop all watering and let the foliage wither away. It will not be a pretty sight so remove the plant

to some out of the way spot during this time. When the foliage has completely dried (in about two months) it can be gently rubbed off the corm without injuring the corm's skin.

Once the corm is cured it can be repotted and a plastic pot is preferred over clay. Use fresh, well-drained, rich potting soil. Only plant the corm halfway; leave the top exposed. This will help to insure a more prolific bloom. Start watering again and during the fine summer weather keep the plant outdoors. Bring the pot back in in the fall and put it in its east window to enjoy cool temperatures and with a little luck Christmas will see you with a plant in bloom.

Although buying a plant from the florist is the easiest way to acquire a cyclamen, it can be grown from seed. Use a sterilized potting medium, water it well and let it drain. Plant seeds one inch apart and cover lightly. Then have patience. Germination may be spotty, but you should have some seedlings to pot up as soon as they are two inches high. While they are getting established they can be put in a north window.

Many cyclamen take 18 months to bloom when grown from seed, but "Puck" is a small variety that will bloom in only six months.

Don't forget, Christmas is coming and a cyclamen might make a wonderful gift. And next week we'll be talking more about Christmas gifts for the gardener.