

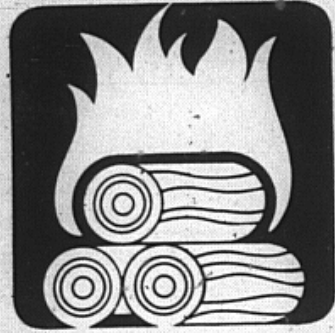
HOME & GARDEN

HEATING TIPS

By GISELA WALKER
Extension Energy Agent

Creosote is deposited in your stovepipe and flue as a result of cool, smokey fires with little air. The wood gases containing the creosote need high temperatures to ignite and burn up. There is a "technological fix" on the market now that burns those smokey gases creeping out of your airtight stove at night without the need for you to let in extra air. This magic device is called a catalytic converter or catalytic combustor or catalytic filter.

Is it the ultimate creosote bail-out? We shall see. Catalytic converters are common in the automobile industry but relatively new in the stove industry. The bugs are being worked out at a rapid pace.



A catalytic converter looks like a round honeycomb, roughly stovepipe-size diameter and a few inches long. Its surface is coated with platinum or palladium, and that is where the magic lies.

In new stoves, the catalytic converter gets placed right before the entrance into the stovepipe. As the smoke passes

through it on its way out of the pipe, it ignites in a clear, hot flame and releases all the heat that would otherwise have gone out the chimney, leaving it coated with creosote. (A catalyst, as you may remember from science class, is a thing that causes chemical reactions in substances without going through a reaction itself.)

So much for the theory. Now what do you do with it?

If you are interested in buying a new stove anyway, you will want to check out those that have built-in catalytic converters — the prices range from \$600 to \$1,500.

Not only will they give you less creosote (and all of us less pollution from your chimney), but they will also have a higher combustion and overall efficiency, if they are designed properly. You will get more heat into your house per log.

If you are happy with your stove but want the advantages of a catalytic combustor, you can install a retrofit between the collar of the stove and the first section of stovepipe. Though some amount of the heat released by the igniting gases goes out the pipe, the converter itself puts out a lot of radiant heat. A local manufacturing company in Millers Falls sells retrofit converters ranging from \$109 to \$169. Retrofits are also available from companies in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Arkansas.

It is important that your unit allows for a smoke bypass so the smoke can go out the flue without having to go through the converter.

I have no data about the life expectancy of catalytic converters. If they last for five years or longer, they may well be a much better way of dealing with creosote than chimney thermometers, smoke eaters and other technological fixes we turn to in order to be excused from the vigilance woodheat requires.

Select and Plant Shrubs Lure Birds to the Garden



Fall berries are a special treat for wild birds. The fruit from many popular shrubs attracts cardinals, hummingbirds, orioles, thrushes and other birds noted for their color or song. This autumn, plant shrubs such as honeysuckle, beauty bush and others that will lure birds to your garden immediately.

Gardenias can be beautiful houseplants

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

There are many flowers that are important to us because of their association. Orchids and carnations (not worn at the same time) remind my daughters of high school dances. The scent of roses reminds me of my grandmother's garden by Lake Champlain in the summer — both rather romantic associations.

Gardenias are another flower that remind me of a time gone by. They don't bring visions of dance floors or summer evenings but rather of teeming New York streets and dark crowded theaters.

When I was in high school, I used to make occasional forays into New York City to attend the Saturday matinee of a stage play. Those trips were always filled with high excitement for me, and I often celebrated by buying a 25-cent gardenia corsage from one of the vendors that seemed to be on every little street corner in the '50s. To this very day, gardenias with their waxy petals the color of heavy cream and sweet fragrance remind me of the rush and blare of traffic and the breath-stopping anticipation that comes as the houselights dim in a crowded theater.

It was many years later that I realized gardenias could be grown as houseplants. My friend Nancy had one, and the scent in her living room was delicious, but I was not tempted to try growing one myself. At that time in my life I inevitably killed houseplants, and as I watched her misting and attaching damp cotton balls to the base of each flower bud to help bring it into bloom, it seemed painfully obvious that gardenias were hard to grow.

Just before we moved to read, we visited another friend,

BETWEEN THE ROWS

who was renovating a tiny house. We ate dinner in a minuscule dining room and were delightfully crowded by a giant gardenia bush. I questioned Ian, asking how he had time to fuss with such a temperamental plant. He shrugged and said he didn't fuss at all. The bush, and it was indeed a sizable bush, sat in a southeast window where the light was very bright, but not sunny, for most of the day. Also, Ian kept a little humidifier in that room because his wood stove made the air very dry. The humidifier is just like one I own, a very inexpensive affair consisting of a plastic reservoir with a little motor that splashes tiny drops of water into the air.

It seemed that the real secret that caused Ian's gardenia to thrive and bloom so vigorously was the heat — or rather the lack of heat. He had an electric back-up system, but for the most part he heated with wood, and that meant for a good part of the day and at night the house was quite cool.

I do not have a huge number of houseplants now because my house is so cold in the winter. We heat completely with wood, and except for the weekends my husband and I are at work all day and the fire fades during the day and again at night after we go to bed. This is very hard on most houseplants because so many of them come from the tropics.

However, my bedroom is now upstairs, which stays a bit warmer than the first floor. I have an east window and I have been thinking that the time may have arrived for me to acquire a gardenia.

In preparation, I have been reading up on gardenias. They should be potted in a rich soil that is equal parts, peat, sand and topsoil. When they are well-budded, they will need to be fertilized with a weak solution of a 15-30-15 fertilizer every 10 days.

After it has bloomed, the plant should be lightly pruned. Cut back about one-third of the new growth; this will encourage strong bushy growth. The plant will now need a period of rest. Do not fertilize, and water less frequently, but don't allow the soil to become completely dry. Make sure it is in bright light, has fairly high humidity — either from a daily misting or a humidifier — and a cool location (about 60 degrees). A weekly shower is also beneficial.

When the plant comes back into bud, water more generously and resume the 10-day fertilization program.

As with most houseplants, gardenias welcome a spell outdoors in the summer. Just be sure that it is protected from direct mid-day sun. Perhaps you have a spot where it will have light shade during the middle of the day.

Gardenias are not troubled by many pests, but you should be on the lookout for mealy bugs. Mealy bugs are soft scale pests that feed by sucking sap. They look like waxy bits of wool on the undersides of leaves. Dabbing at them with a Q-tip dipped in alcohol will dissolve their protective waxy coating and kill them. After using alcohol, you should give the plant a thorough showering.

With its dark glossy leaves and perfumed flowers, the gardenia is such a handsome plant that it is worth a little extra trouble.