



BULLETIN

Executive Secretary/Treasurer, Ann Reilly
210 Cartwright Blvd., Massapequa Park, NY 11762

GROWING FOLIAGE PLANTS FROM SEED

by Leonard P. Perry and James W. Boodley

Editor's Note: Cornell University researchers are paving the way for home gardeners to take on an unusual indoor gardening activity—growing exotic foliage plants of tropical origin directly from seeds. This method of plant propagation also offers a potential for commercial growers in the northeastern United States. Seeds are shipped more easily from distant sources than are bulky plant cuttings.

Here is a new and exciting challenge for consumers—growing their own foliage or house plants from seeds. The main users of this propagation method at present are a few large wholesale florists growing a few kinds of foliage plants. There is no reason why the consumer shouldn't get involved, for it offers:

- 1) A new experience for those who have exhausted other aspects of foliage plant culture, and also a challenge, as some kinds of foliage plant seeds germinate sparsely and only with special attention.
- 2) A generally inexpensive way to grow several each of many types of plants with extras for exchanging with neighbors or giving as gifts.
- 3) The opportunity to grow foliage plants from start to finish, watching them grow from seedling to mature plant.
- 4) The opportunity to grow and try in the home new and exotic foliage plants which are still rare and uncommon in the trade, gathered from the far reaches of the globe.
- 5) A method of propagation fairly free from disease.
- 6) Acclimation, from the start, of the plants to northern conditions, especially lower light levels. This means better plants, with a greater chance of survival in the home.

When starting foliage plants from seeds there are few general recommendations, each type of seed having its own best treatments. There are a couple of recommendations worth noting:

Sowing Medium

The sowing medium which gives highest germination percentages for most foliage plants is either Cornell peat-lite mix "A" or one of the commercial peat-lite mixes. A similar medium can be prepared by combining equal parts by volume of peat moss and vermiculite, and additional nutrients, plus dolomitic limestone to maintain pH 5 to pH 6.

Sphagnum peat moss used alone has been recommended as it:

- 1) is easy to obtain,
- 2) remains moist after the initial watering, requiring little time and effort for frequent misting, and
- 3) has fungistatic properties which prevent disease, especially "damping off".

Its drawbacks are that sphagnum peat moss:

- 1) may be too acid for some seeds,
- 2) has few or no nutrients for seedling growth,
- 3) is difficult to wet initially, and
- 4) often makes sowing seeds and transplanting seedlings difficult.

If peat moss is used it should first be passed through a 1/2-inch wire mesh, screen or sieve to remove sticks and debris. Then before sowing the seeds it should be wet thoroughly. This may be done by using a wetting agent like Aquagro (5 tablespoonsful per bushel), warm water, or even a small amount of household detergent like Ivory liquid (1/2 teaspoonful in one gallon of water).



Whatever medium is used should be moist before sowing. All seeds should be sown at a depth of twice their diameter, except for *Ficus* seeds which are light-requiring and should be sown on the surface of the medium. After sowing, the medium should then be remoistened with a fine spray of water, such as from a Foggit nozzle or watering can with a breaker, and either:

- 1) placed under a glass dome or pane, or plastic bag, until the seedling emerges from the soil (keep out of direct light while covered), or
- 2) misted frequently.

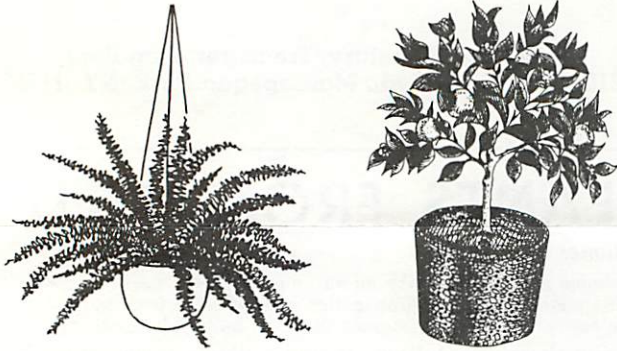
The *object* is for the germination medium to stay *evenly moist* at all times, not becoming too wet or drying out.

(continued on page 2)

Growing Foliage Plants from Seed (continued)

Bottom Heat

Since most foliage plants are from the tropics, their seeds usually need a warm medium in which to germinate—75° to 85°F. This may be measured by a thermometer stuck in the medium, and if needed, heat provided by heating cables or a germination mat (there are relatively inexpensive ones on the market) under the container or buried at the bottom of the medium.



Perishable Seeds

Some foliage plant seeds are short-lived, or perishable, and should be planted immediately or as soon as possible after they have been received. Even then it may be too late. Some need planting soon after harvesting in order to germinate.

Most perishable seeds are either in the Aralia family (Araliaceae) or Arum family (Araceae). A few palm seeds are also perishable, one being *Chamaedorea elegans* (*Neanthe Bella*), the Parlor Palm.

Examples:

Araliaceae:

Brassaia actinophylla
Dizygotheca elegantissima
Fatsia japonica
Heptapleurum (Schefflera) arboricola
Schefflera octophylla

Araceae:

Philodendron Imbe
Philodendron Lundii
Nephtytis 'Emerald Gem'

(More next month)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Ms. Reilly:

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Sincerely,
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Editor's Note: For more information on the I.C. System, write to 3499 North Lexington Avenue, P.O. Box 43567, St. Paul, MN 55164.

For Your Reading . . .

Cornell Recommendations for Floriculture Crops

Part II of this Cornell Publication is now available, covering Pest Control—Disease, Insects and Weeds. If you haven't already received a copy, it is available from your local Cooperative Extension Agent or from the Mailing Room, 7 Research Park, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. (send \$1.50 for each copy). When you receive yours, you will notice that it is much more comprehensive than former editions, with many areas expanded. These include a table of fungicides, nematicides, and disinfectants for bulbs, soil, benches and equipment; a table of fungicides for foliar application; a list of common foliage plant diseases; lists of pesticides and weed control.

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