

"PLANT NURSE" AERATOR

New Air Machine For House Plants

"Housewives are buying them up about as fast as we've been able to stock them," reports a Denver, Colorado retailer, one of the first in the nation to sell the new Plant Nurse, a \$15 machine which mechanically injects air into the root zone of potted plants.

"Each time you water the plant, you use the Plant Nurse to aerate the soil for about 15 minutes. This benefits the plant three ways," says Carlos Hamilton, research specialist with the Lockwood Corp., Gering, Neb., manufacturer of the new Plant Nurse aerator:

1. "Injecting air into the soil replaces air lost due to soil compaction.
2. "Since plants "breathe" through their root systems, and watering forces air out, aeration quickly establishes the optimum air-water ratio for healthy growth.
3. "The Plant Nurse stimulates nutrient uptake, allowing the plant to take full advantage of soil nutrients. The result is bigger, faster-growing and more beautiful plants," says Hamilton.

FARM SHOW asked Extension Horticulturist Deborah Brown at the University of Minnesota, St. Paul, about the Plant Nurse air machine. "It sounds like a gimmick to me, but that's off the cuff. I haven't seen the machine or studied the idea," she reported.

Brown noted that "plants do need

oxygen and that watering, especially over-watering, can fill the air space in the soil. If a plant is started with a loose soil mixture, including perhaps peat or Perlite, and if the plant is repotted yearly, there should be no shortage of air and oxygen in the soil. Such a mixture is porous and, as the roots use up water, small vacuums are created that pull in air. "If the soil is compact and so tight that it excludes oxygen, then the best thing to do is repot the plant with new, loose soil," said Brown.

Asked to respond to Brown's comments, Carlos Hamilton, research specialist at Lockwood Corp., agreed that repotting can improve plant performance. "But most people with plants often don't do that very well, and don't repot when necessary. Our Plant Nurse aerator helps overcome the tight soil problem. It does the most good in real tight soil, when it isn't porous enough.

"Housewives often don't have time to take proper care of their plants and often overwater them — which is the main reason most plants die. Our aeration machine forces excess water out of the pot's drain holes, and helps restore the oxygen-water balance in the root zone."

Limited soil aeration research has been conducted on field crops. University of Nebraska studies at the Panhandle Research Station in Scottsbluff has shown "a mixed bag



Plant Nurse injects air into root system of house plants to promote faster, healthier growth, says manufacturer.

of results, but nothing extremely positive when the root zones of field corn and potatoes were mechanically aerated," reports Dean Yonts, irrigation research specialist. He notes that two years of experimentation on the idea has shown very little effect on field corn. "Growth of the root systems was better in the aerated plots than the non-aerated, but we didn't see any significant difference in either corn grain or forage yield."

Test plots were $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in size.

With potatoes, Nebraska experiments again showed no increase in yield, but there was a quality improvement in aerated plots — fewer growth cracks in the potatoes them-

selves, making them better for manufacturing chips, says Yonts. He feels the idea of aerating soil around plants may have potential for house plants, but probably not for field crops: "The cost would be pretty high, in terms of installing aeration systems and the equipment and power to pump air into large areas of ground, and probably not economically feasible unless drastic yield increases could be achieved."

For more information on the new Plant Nurse aerator, which sells for \$15, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Lockwood Corp., P.O. Box 160, Gering, Neb. 69341 (ph 308 436-5051).

CARDING MILL DOING BOOMING BUSINESS

New "Life" For Old Wool Quilts

Don't throw away those old wool quilts that don't seem to have any life left in them. You can send them out to be revitalized, and they'll come back like new.

A Wisconsin couple, Jim and Kay Kaufman, of Cato, operate a carding mill and are doing a "booming business" with customers from coast to coast. Their main business is carding old quilt batts that have become compressed and lost their insulating value. (Carding is the process of separating wool fibers and combing them so they lie in the same direction.) A carded wool batt puffs up to 4 in. thick, making it a good insulator.

The Kaufmans bought a 50-year-old carding mill two years ago, and their carding business has mushroomed ever since. They will wash and card an old wool batt for \$1.30 per lb. Carding only is 85 cents a lb.

The Kaufmans also custom card new wool, but they do not wash raw wool. Kay Kaufman points out that carding is only for wool batts, not for woven fabrics like old blankets. They also sell new wool that has been

carded for quilting at a price of \$5 a lb.

A lot of the carding work falls to Kay, as her husband still holds a job in town. They are also in the wool production business with a flock of 60 ewes of their own. They hope to build the number to 200 and work full-time at raising sheep and carding wool.

"We have customers in Alaska, New York, Louisiana, California and more than a dozen other states," says Kay. "Not all carded wool is used for quilts. One customer is using it for a noise insulator for his stereo equipment, and another is using it for a spray painting filter."

Wool can be shipped by regular mail or United Parcel Service, and it is not usually necessary to check with Kaufmans before sending it. Customers should allow two weeks for processing, plus shipping time.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Kaufman Woolen Mill, Route 1, Cato, Wis. 54206 (ph 414 775-4301).



Carding old wool quilts separates and combs the fibers, restoring their insulating value.