

NEW HOBBY IN MANILA

Garden in a bottle

Perhaps it was the Green Revolution that did it. Perhaps it was the continuing search for things of beauty, specially in a place far removed from the countryside. Or perhaps it was a combination of these and other factors. Whichever it was, "bottle gardening" is becoming a popular new hobby in Greater Manila.

Actually, the bottled garden, or terrarium, is not at all new. It has been around in some other places, for at least a hundred years. Back in the 1900s, Nathaniel Ward, a London physician, observed that ferns and other grasses grew more satisfactorily in the fume-filled city if they were kept under glass-sided cases near the window. Ward decided to experiment with planting inside bottles. The result was a blooming success and in time, bottle gardening developed into an art. It is not, however, an art that endures. The average life span of a bottled garden is about a year. After that, the stems, roots and leaves become too crowded as to make replanting necessary.

How does one go about gardening inside a bottle? An old English recipe for rabbit stew starts with, "First, find your rabbit..." In like manner, one must first find one's bottle. The crystal has to be clear, with no grooves or letterings or stains to mar the view. When it comes to size and shape, any contour will do although round bottles with small mouths are preferable. The demijohn is said to be most ideal



Terrarium: a world in itself.

for the purpose although wine bottles and apothecary jars are also suitable.

Clean the bottle with water mixed with sand and cleansing detergent. Swish cleansing water around inside the bottle. Then rinse with plain water and allow the bottle to dry.

While waiting for the bottle to dry, one can prepare the planting medium, a mixture of 50 percent dry porous soil, 25 percent fine sand and 25 percent compost. It should be sterilized

to prevent molds from forming. Sterilize the soil mixture by pouring boiling water over it and then dry it under the sun. Spraying with fungicide would also help.

The thing to guard against is acidity in the medium because this is what causes some plants to rot. Acidity comes from stored moisture so it is important that the soil mixture be sufficiently dry. Besides, a wet mixture will be difficult to introduce into the bottle. As an extra precaution, cover the bottom of the bottle with crushed charcoal — about an inch thick. (Charcoal contains carbon which would neutralize the acidity resulting from stored moisture.) Then follow with the soil mixture.

The amount of soil needed would of course depend on the size and the thickness of the bottle. Usually, a four- to five-inch thickness is just right. Pour the soil through a paper funnel and then shake it to the desired topography.

And now, for the planting itself. There is no magic trick to getting those leaves and stems through and arranged in a beautiful composition. All it takes is a little perseverance and ingenuity. Experience in manipulating puppets would be helpful but not really necessary. Where the choice of plants is concerned, only the slow-growing and shade-loving should be considered. Creepers and herb types are highly recommended.

Clean the plants free of insect pests and dead leaves before lowering them into the bottle. One must begin planting at the sides and one must start with the shorter plants. This system, obviously, makes for a better working arrangement. Push the stems with a flat end of a stick. (One would need two kinds of sticks with flat ends — a

straight one and a curved one for working at the sides of the bottle.) At this point, it would be well to bear in mind that underplanting is better than overplanting. For one thing, the plants will grow so fast that space will soon be at a premium. For another, a packed arrangement leaves little room for appreciation of the composition. (This is probably why Ikebana enthusiasts find greater satisfaction in bottle gardening than others.)

When the plants have been arranged to one's satisfaction, water the glass-encased garden with just enough water to moisten the soil. Pour only about a glassful at first. Wait until the following day to add a little more — if necessary. This procedure has to be followed because excess water cannot be removed from a bottled garden. When watering, let the water drip at the sides instead of pouring it at the center so that dust and other dirt can be washed down with it. Afterwards, cover the bottle tightly. The idea behind this is to conserve the water by preventing evaporation. The moisture which condenses at the sides of the bottle will just naturally drip down to the soil and seep through to the roots. Thus, subsequent watering will only be a sometime thing. In fact, a bottled garden can be left without attention for several months.

As for the proper place to set down one's bottled garden, just remember that strong sunlight will cause the bottle to become hot — wilting the plants inside. On the other hand, placing it in a much too shady spot will cause the plants to grow weak and maybe even to rot. The best thing would be to take the middle ground and place the bottled garden where it can receive filtered or indirect sunlight.

PEOPLE

"They have equally extended understanding and appreciation for the Philippine standards of culture, tradition and aspirations," President Marcos declared as he conferred the Order of Sikatuna, rank of datu, on Ambassador Pierre Revol of France and Ambassador Tjark A. Meurs of the Netherlands. "For this," the President said, "there can be nothing but gratitude in our hearts." The two ambassadors, who are ending their tour of duty in the Philippines, were equally appreciative of the awards presented to them at ceremonies attended by the First Lady, Mrs. Imelda R. Marcos and the chiefs of diplomatic missions. Ambassador Revol expressed the modest hope that he had, in some measure, contributed to the promotion of better relations between his country and the Philippines. Ambassador Meurs, on the other hand, expressed optimism about the success of the new society.

Not a few commented on her mini-dress but Anna Chennault, President Nixon's representative to the Philippine Aviation Week celebration, is far too purposeful a person to be distracted by frivolous comments. "I am a fighter for women's rights," she told an interviewer. "Women have great capabilities. They should be allowed to work

side by side with men." The widow of Maj. Gen. Claire Lee Chennault of Flying Tigers fame is her own best example of womenpower at its most effective. She had been a tireless worker in the 1960, 1968 and 1972 Nixon campaigns and is right now vice president for international affairs of Flying Tigers Line. She is also reputed to be the unofficial hostess of official Washington. The parties she gives have been described as "flawless but swinging."

It was the singer, not the song, that won a prize for the Philippines in the recently concluded Tokyo Music Festival. The judges, among them 10 Japanese, six Americans, two Frenchmen and two Englishmen, awarded the "best song interpreter" trophy to Pilita Corrales, Asia's Queen of Song, for her interpretation of "My Daughter." The song, written and composed by George Canseco and arranged by Doming Valdez, was one of the 26 compositions which made the semi-finals in the international competition held at the Imperial Theater. "What is less known," Pilita told newsmen during her SRO performance at the National Press Club Friday night, "is that 'My Daughter' was one of the top five." Pilita, looking like a singing Mata Hari in her black, peek-a-boo mini-dress, went on with the intelligence that Les Reed (Les Reed Organization, Britain) had expressed interest in acquiring publishing rights. Vic-



Pilita Corrales

tor Company of Japan has already acquired rights to the original master recording and will soon market Pilita's version (in English and Japanese) of "My Daughter."

Even Edison would have been impressed. At the age of 10, Napoleon A. Basa invented a therapeutic steam bath and bathing apparatus. Since then, Basa, a native of Batangas, in Southern Luzon, has invented, among other things, a hair washer, a manually operated fluid pressure rotary drive, a mechanical dispense, a main course/salad dressing counter, aquatic lounges and tray ensembles. Most recently, he

invented the "Green Revolution water sprayer" which, he says, could also be fed with fertilizer solutions or pest control chemicals. For this invention, Basa has a patent pending in the U.S. and in several other countries. His therapeutic steam and bathing apparatus now carries U.S. Patent 3649971. However, Basa, whose inventions were displayed by the National Science Development Board during the 1973 Inventors Week, is more interested in having these manufactured in the Philippines. What does he do when not tinkering with some new-fangled idea? Napoleon A. Basa, commissary first class, works as supervisor of food handlers at the Subic Bay Naval Base Galley in Zambales province.

It was the first time it happened in the history of the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) — a tie was declared in the competition for the Best Actress Award. The two actresses — Boots Anson Roa and Vilma Santos, were less surprised by the tie than by the fact that they had won. Both said they had expected one of the more seasoned actresses nominated for the 1972 FAMAS Awards to walk off with the Maria Clara statuette. Boots won for her portrayal of the squatter's wife in "Tatay na si Erap," while Vilma Santos won for her dramatic role in "Dama de Noche."