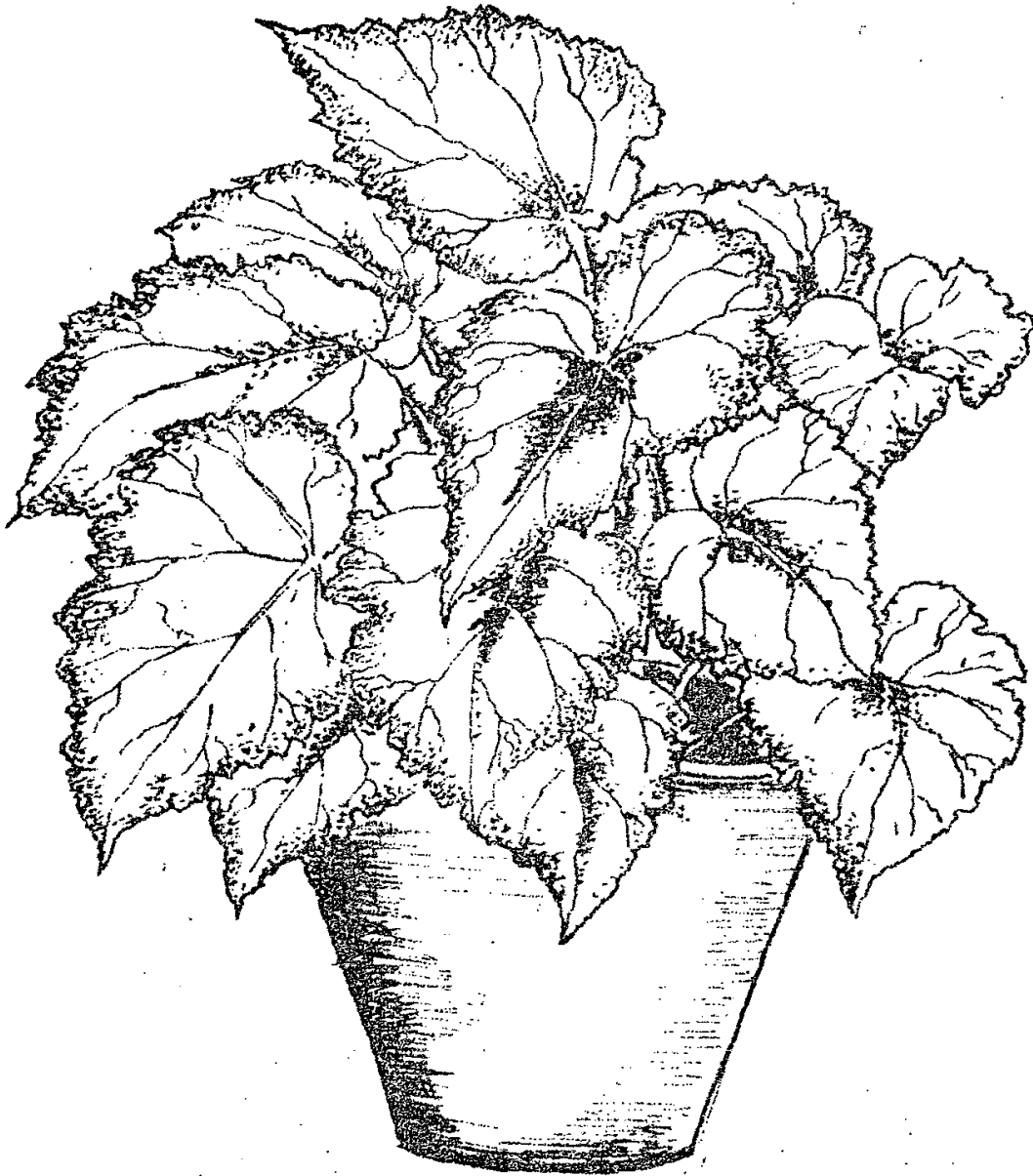


FOLIAGE PLANTS

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Foliage plants are those grown almost entirely for the effect given by their leaves. Inflorescences and fruits are secondary. However, judging from the foreign demand, it would be more accurate to use the term "Ornamental Tropical Plants for Interior Use," or more simply "house plants". House plants comprise a large variety of families, species and cultivars ranging from aroids to cacti and succulents to palms. All of them are in constant demand and it remains for Sri Lankan Nurseryman to grow those best suited to the climate.

Supply:

During colonial period, a large variety of plants of foreign origin have been grown in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese imported hardy drought resistant plants like Yuccca, Cereus, Agave and Opuntia from their South American Colonies. Dutch brought in spices together with exotics such as Aglaonema, Plumeria, and Maranta. British imported many of the beautiful new varieties from Kew Gardens and almost all of them flourished. As a result we have enormous reserves of Codiaem (Croton), Dracaena, Cordyline, Pleomele, Polycias, Begonia, African Violets and Peper-omias.

Demand

The demand for ornamental plants has grown a great deal in recent years due to fuel crisis in cooler countries where hot house and nurserymen find it increasingly uneconomical to propagate many ornamental plants. There is also the escalating cost of labour in those countries.

With the sudden great affluence of people in the Arab States and Middle East, the ornamental plant trade has had a corresponding upsurge. It appears as if the wealthy Middle East consumers are prepared to pay premium prices for special types, particularly those of large size. Whereas growing ornamental plants to large size in cold country hot-houses is very expensive. In Sri Lanka it is merely a question of time. Our heat is free and also our light, almost all the year round- and for the most parts we have ample water resources.

The demand varies, certain plants get over-common and the prices drop below an economic level for importers who are paying heavy freight bills. There is also a trend as in clothes fashions, where the consumer is stimulated to demand old favourites like Palms or go in for prestigious new sensations. All trends must necessarily be located and analysed by Export Promotion Authorities in order to advise the growers.

Average nurserymen in Sri Lanka cannot usually propagate only one or two best-sellers and expect to stay in business year after year. It has been found from actual experience that in the ornamental plant export trade, there should be parent stock or reserves of up to fifty popular items of which ten or so many be mass produced to meet the demand. The rest could be kept on in case of future demand or trends.

The demand for ornamental plants can be classified into:-

1. Seeds (eg. Palms, Jatropha, Asparagus, Aglaonema).

Seeds which last long travel well and germinate fast are obviously the most in demand. The freight costs are lower and in some cases very attractive prices per Kg are payable for certain species.

2. Bulbs, Corms:

Many ornamentals do not travel well with leaves and some are essentially annuals, so that shipping bulbs from cultivated stock is the best way. Demand for bulbs and corms is very seasonal. The buyer and nurserymen abroad must have them in time to put down and be ready for peak seasons like Christmas or early Summer. Those bulbs most in demand are of water lilies, wild or cultivated (Nymphaea, Cannas, Caladium, even Gloriosa superba and Asparagus).

3. Canes:

These are branches of certain plants which travel well and will sprout at any time of the year if given the correct conditions. Nurserymen abroad who have space, labour and more than the usual power resources at an economical rate, will buy canes of Dracaena, Aglaonema, Diffenbachia and others. The demand for canes, is understandably greater in warmer countries

and in the past considerable quantities of these have been shipped to Thailand and Singapore.

4. Simple cuttings and Top cuttings:

Many house plants with woody stems can be propagated easily, especially in warmer countries, by the import of top cuttings (as in Pleomele reflexa variegata, Codiaeum, Hibiscus etc.) There is a constant demand for these but the prices payable fall far below that of the rooted products.

5. Rooted tops and plants:

By far the most lucrative and desirable export product in ornamentals is the rooted plants or plantlets propagated from seeds, tops, simple cuttings or node cuttings. The bulk of the European and Middle East demand centres round these, but the quality standards are exacting, also the quantities.

Zonation of ornamental plants:

Since we are yet to assume the status of a developed country, we must seek to propagate plants best suited to our climates, making maximum use of our cheap assets, viz. temperature, sunlight, soils and water resources.

Broadly the climate suited for growing ornamental plants are:-

1. Cool dry : In the Diyatalawa area, where succulents and semi tropical plants will flourish.
2. Cool wet : Nuwara Eliya and Pussellawa, where certain Calatheas flourish, as well as Hedera, Cypresses and Tree ferns.
3. Warm Dry : Most of the North Central province and even the arid zone can have

nurseries for growing ornamental Cacti,
Euphorbias, Adenium and Bougainvillea
all of which find markets abroad.

4. Warm wet : Most of the South West of Sri Lanka is ideal for growing of many ornamental and true foliage plants and with the little variations of rainfall, cloud cover and humidity, nurserymen, can soon ascertain as to what grows best, and can be propagated at the lowest cost in this area.

The very wet and relatively well cloud-covered Sabaragamuwa Province would be ideal for Philodendrons, Aglaonemas, Diffenbachias and many others.

5. Mid-country: Around Kandy and Matale-most of the house plants can be grown very successfully. Eg. Begonia, Peparomia, African Violets, Philodendrons, Marantas, Calathea, Dracaena, and Cordyline.

Medium for potting foliage plants
including Begonia:

Loam Soil	4 parts
Compost	2 "
(2 parts leaf mould + 1 part cattle manure)	
Sand	1 part
Crushed brick	1/4 "
Crushed charcoal	1/4 "

Medium for propagation:

Leaf mould	1 part
River sand	1 "
Or	
Sand	1 part
Coir dust	1/2 "

Artificial Fertilizers:

An artificial fertilizer can be used one month after potting. One of the following can be used twice a month.

Hyponex, Baur's 20-20-20, Florex, Maxicrop.

Pests and diseases:

Insects like Caterpillars can damage the foliage. They can be controlled by spraying Carbaryl. Rogor also can be used once a month to prevent most insect damages.

Root rot and leaf spot can be caused by excessive watering. These affected plants should be repotted using fresh compost and sprayed with a fungicide such as Thiovit, Thiotox or Captan.

Nursery Sheds:

All indoor plants should be kept under shade. They can be displayed in a shed covered with coir mesh or plastic shade cloth. Corrugated plastic sheets can be used as a shade for Begonias to protect them from heavy rains.

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