



Oleander

➤ A FINE plant for winter blooming, better known to our grandmothers than to ourselves because they had real houses to live in instead of apartments, is the oleander. Its disadvantage for present-day house culture lies in its ambition, for it likes to grow up into a little tree rather than remain as a small, compact shrub, and that requires a good deal of room. But anyone who can spare the space for an oleander tub will be well rewarded with gorgeous masses of pink or white bloom.

The reason for the oleander's success in indoor culture lies in the paradoxical fact that it is at once a swamp plant and a desert plant. That is the situation most houseplants find themselves up against. Solicitous owners are apt to over-water them, and at the same time their tops are exposed to air that is like that of a desert in its dryness.

The oleander has been growing for ages in just such a habitat in its widespread native home in Mediterranean and Oriental regions. Its generic name, *Nerium*, comes from a Greek word meaning moisture, for in the wild it grows in wet soil. But at the same time its leaves are exposed to the hot sun and the drying winds of the warmer

Levant. It is like a palm tree in this: its roots in a swamp and its top in the desert.

The stiff, tough, dark-green leaves are at once reminiscent of desert vegetation. They exude a milky juice when punctured. This juice is marked by its poisonous properties. It is reported that in the course of the Peninsular War some French soldiers died from roasting their meat on skewers made of freshly-cut twigs of oleander.

The Roman naturalist, Pliny, mentions

its rose-like flowers and poisonous qualities, at the same time stating that it was considered serviceable as a remedy against snake-bite.

There are two species of oleander, very much alike in general appearance, but distinguishable by the fact that one has scented flowers, while the flowers of the other are odorless. Both varieties, however, exude the milky substance that is poisonous for both humans and animals if eaten.

Science News Letter, January 27, 1951

RADIO

FM Used for Telegrams

➤ FREQUENCY MODULATION, familiar as FM to radio fans, is in successful operation on the huge trunk-line and tributary network of the Western Union Telegraph Company, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers was told at its meeting in New York.

Nearly 2,000,000 miles of circuits linking the principal cities of the nation are involved, according to Western Union engineers, F. B. Bramhall and L. A. Smith. The circuits, embodying automatic switching and virtually doing away with manually handled telegrams, except in small towns, has speeded up transmission of messages, reduced time lost because of system trouble, and reduced maintenance, they said.

Western Union made limited FM field installations on an experimental basis during 1930-40, but in 1946 began a wholesale conversion to this system, they stated. "Installation, operation and maintenance have

been economical, and the continuity of service obtained has improved to a marked degree."

Studies in heating, ventilating, air-conditioning and refrigeration will be aided by two new instruments for measuring radiation on the earth's surface described to the meeting by J. T. Geir and R. V. Dunkle, University of California at Berkeley. The development was made possible through a thermal radiation project sponsored by the U. S. Office of Naval Research.

One is a flat plane radiometer, the other a total hemispherical radiometer. The devices have been developed primarily to measure the total irradiation, atmospheric plus solar, and can be used for both day and night measurements. They will serve a useful purpose in studying evaporation, the problems of freezing of crops, and snow melting rates.

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ENGINEERING

River Sounded from Air

➤ A SURVEY of the river bed from the crest of Niagara Falls upstream a mile to Goat Island has at last been made, thanks to a hovering helicopter. All earlier attempts by engineers to make general soundings in the river have been foiled by rush of the perilous waters.

This survey of the Niagara River bed above the falls was undertaken as a result of the treaty signed with Canada in October of the past year. The survey will help to determine the amount of water that can be diverted to provide electric power without affecting the beauty and grandeur of the falls. The water diverted will be divided between the two countries on a 50-50 basis.

The survey was made by U. S. Army Corps of Engineers with the aid of a specially equipped helicopter leased from Bell Aircraft Corporation. It is the ability of the helicopter to hover, that is, remain almost stationary in the air, that made its successful use possible. From it, hovering 1,000 or more feet above the river at stations 300 feet apart, soundings were taken with a lead-weighted steel line.

Readings of the steel line were taken by four surveying parties with instruments stationed at different points on the shore. Two-way radio connected the aircraft with the ground crews. The area charted is about a square mile in extent. A total of 252 soundings were made. As many as 77 were made in a single day. Soundings of the river above Goat Island as far as Lake Erie were made by normal methods.

Science News Letter, January 27, 1951

The America *opossum* is the only mammal in this country that raises its young in a pouch similar to that of the kangaroo of Australia.

A lot of insect trouble next summer can be prevented by *spraying* now to kill the insect eggs.

Young *crocodiles* in captivity in zoological gardens have big appetites; a problem in rearing them is to keep them from over-eating.

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