

Birth Control Pill Help Plants Multiply

Birth control pills for plants? When Bob Kundtz said he wanted some for a horticultural experiment both his doctor and druggist were taken aback.

But Kundtz, known as the "wizard" of Florida's Cypress Gardens, wanted the pills, not to prevent conception but to get some plants to reproduce.

Soaked in a solution of one birth control pill to one quart of water, the plants soon sprout new offshoots complete with root systems. The offshoots are then separated and potted as new plants.

"I first heard of it in Australia about three years ago," says the well-traveled vice president of the famous flower-and-water-ski attraction in Central Florida.

"I couldn't get a variegated pineapple to put out new growth quick enough. And this friend of mine said, 'No problem, old chap. Do thus and so.'

"I thought he was pulling my leg, but I kept it in the back of my mind," Kundtz says. "It sort of bugged me.

"About a year later, I couldn't get a pandanus (a member of the lily family) to throw any keiki (a horticulture term for new growth). So I went to the drugstore and asked for some birth control pills.

"There was a lot of whispering in the back of the store, and then I found out I needed a prescription for them. So, I went over to my doctor. He said, 'Bob, does your wife know?'"

But Kundtz persisted through all the ribbing, got his pills and tried them out.

"It really does work," he says. "Little plants come out thicker than hairs on a dog's back."

Kundtz says a gynecologist friend of his believes it's the estrogen — a growth hormone — in the pills that causes new plant growth quickly.



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So far, he knows the pills work on the lily family, bromeliads and ferns.

Now, Kundtz is trying to find out whether he can get other plants to do the same. He is treating tomatoes and pepper plants in his home garden and intends to try the pills on shrubs.

"It's really too early to tell, but the peppers seem to be branching," he says. "I'm going to keep playing around with it and see what else I can do."

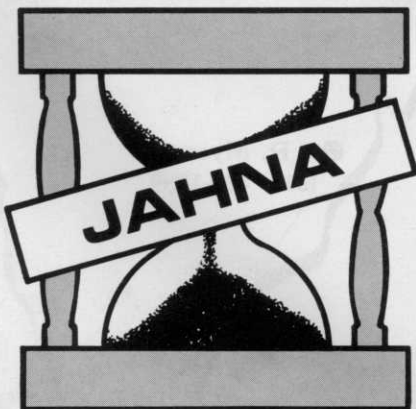
He's also interested in seeing whether the birth control pill solution would increase root systems in trees and stimulate flowering, which in fruit trees would mean more fruit or berries.

He says a home gardener can probably get results as well as anyone but jokingly warns that the pills aren't cleared by the Food and Drug Administration for gardening.

"It certainly doesn't hurt the plant any," he says.

And knowing how you can help your plants doesn't help you in getting the pills if you're a male greenthumb. Most doctors frown on issuing the birth control prescriptions for philodendrons. ■

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