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Potting Soil

It is often better and far cheaper to mix your own potting soil. Since some potting mixes consist almost exclusively of ground up leaves, take the hint. Make potting mixtures by mixing common soil with an equal amount of organic matter, either from composted leaves or peat moss.

Don't depend too much on peat moss, though, as it has no nutrient value. Use it only to improve the soil texture and for its moisture-holding power. You can starve a plant in peat moss, but not in composted leaves. Use 20 to 25 percent sand or perlite to give the potting mix good drainage properties.

Use fish emulsion fertilizers for indoor gardening. They are safe and contain all the essential elements for good plant nutrition; nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, plus all of the trace elements. Fish emulsion fertilizers are also fairly inexpensive.

Contrary to what you might read in some gardening publications, don't bother with sterilization of potting mixes. This process does kill weed seeds, but it also kills many beneficial organisms, such as soil bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi, which form symbiotic associations with plant roots.

Don't use dry hydrated or burnt lime for decreasing the acidity of planting mixes. Use dolomitic limestone instead. One application will supply sufficient calcium and magnesium for one to two years.

Keep in mind that a potting mixture comprised of soil, humus, and sand or perlite in equal amounts will be satisfactory for most plants.

Country Club Taxes

Maryland's country clubs made the news again. The *Washington Post* (Monday, April 7) featured another gripe article on the tax status of country clubs that take advantage of the tax break if the club "promises to keep their land in open space for 10 years." This agreement can be renewed for succeeding 10 year periods. This state law was formed back in 1966 and next year will terminate the first 10-year period agreement.

Under the present law, country clubs are exempt from annual land assessment increases and pay virtually the same rate of taxes each year, even though the value of land around the country club is continually rising. In 1966 when the agreements were signed, the assessed value for club land was about 54% of the fair market value. Since these assessments have not changed despite inflation, the current assessment value is now only 28% of the fair market value. A bill was recently introduced to increase country club assessments to 50% of the fair market value but fortunately the House Ways and Means Committee killed the bill without a vote.

Ralph Nader is behind all this renewed publicity and we can expect to see continued articles in the news until which time the 1976 agreements are signed for another 10-year period. This proposed tax assessment, or any future similar tax assessment increase, is based on poor logic and doubtfully will never gain any more attention than what would normally be dead newspaper space.

Any additional tax assessment will result in a higher dues structure for all country clubs throughout the state. The majority of members are not rich and are already cutting their expenses to survive our inflation. These members would drop their memberships and virtually take country clubs off the map, if they are faced with large dues assessments. What happens then?

The state will be faced with increased overcrowded recreational facilities as country club members turn to the use of state recreational facilities. More park and municipal golf courses will be needed, all resulting in increased expenses for the state.

The old site of the private golf course will become another community development forcing the need for more public schools, libraries, roads, and other state-supported community services, all resulting in increased expenses for the state.

The far-reaching effects of putting the country clubs out of reach of the average income bracket would be disastrous to the state's economy and our legislators know this. They also probably belong to a country club and are not about to cut their own throat! So in the year to come, watch Nader's Raiders closely, but don't be overly alarmed by what the newspapers have to say until the state legislature chooses to show some interest.