From Banana Trees to Roses

The Iowa Homemaker

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FROM A BANANA tree to the common carnation, the college greenhouses display color and greenery in a welcome contrast to the drab, cold January outside.

If you enter the greenhouse from the south door which faces toward Curtiss Hall, you will find yourself transported to the tropics. In this tropical house, you can wander among palms and banana trees, fig trees and lemon trees.

Kept at a temperature between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit, this house displays a collection of many kinds of typical fruits and ornamentals from tropical areas. One of the interesting trees is a southern hemisphere version of the white pine called the Norfolk Island Pine. Its leaves shape into intriguing whorls.

In addition to the fruit trees mentioned there are also orange trees and cumquats. With the exception of the lemon tree, none of these are bearing fruit at the present time, but a summer visit might find this situation reversed.

Some of the ornamentals here include Bougainvillea, a climbing shrub having numerous flowers, and taro, a plant whose roots are used for food in tropical countries. The roots are ground, mixed into a paste and allowed to ferment, making a food called poi. Here the plant is used only for an ornamental.

One house visitors always want to see is the tropical house. Here, at temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit, are grown typical specimens of many tropical fruits and ornamentals. The tree pictured at the upper right is a Variegated Fig. This does not bear edible fruit, but the specimen in this greenhouse is one of the few in existence. Directly below the fig is an example of the Rattan palm from which the popular Rattan summer furniture is made. One of the interesting tropical fruits not included in the picture is the Ponderosa Lemon. This tree is bearing large lemons at the present time and is one of the few trees which also has flowers and green fruit at the same time. Other fruits are oranges, figs and cumquats.
Banana Trees to Roses

One variety in the tropical greenhouse which often draws comment is a relative of the lilly called the Glory-Bower. Because this plant closely resembles a corn plant, many people question the use of corn as a part of a tropical display.

If you take any one of the three vine-covered doorways out of the tropical room, you will find yourself in a combination classroom, research center. Here is the main work of the greenhouses. Almost all classes in Horticulture use the greenhouse in some way. Courses in greenhouse management and plant propagation are particularly active here.

The girls aren't left out either. A very popular course among Home Economics majors is Horticulture 146, Home Floriculture and Flower Arrangement. The instructors endeavor to make this a very practical as well as enjoyable course, one of the goals being to get your "hands in the dirt" during each class period.

Many of the greenhouse doors are marked with the name of some research project. Research is carried on by members of the staff, either independently or as part of United States Department of Agriculture projects.

A product of research here that is now becoming widespread is a new geranium variety called Pink Cloud which was developed by Professor E. C. Volz. Other present research projects include further work with geranium breeding, rose breeding, lilly diseases and pot plant soils. U.S.D.A. projects include work with potatoes and onions.

Another minor project of the greenhouse is sales. Only surplus materials are sold in the sales room, and they are not graded. However, it is possible to purchase house plants and cut varieties there at reasonable prices.

The greenhouse is open to visitors from 8 to 11:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1:10 to 4:10 p.m. Monday through Friday.

January, 1959