The "fruit salad plant" (monstera deliciosa)
THE "FRUIT SALAD PLANT"
(Monstera deliciosa)

ALTHOUGH familiar to Queenslanders, the plant forming the subject of this issue's cover picture is something of a rarity in Western Australia. This specimen is growing in a cut-down oil drum in a Nedlands garden.

The Monstera deliciosa is a native of tropical America and the West Indies. It climbs on any suitable support by means of its aerial roots, and visitors to Brisbane will remember the unusual effect of these plants growing as climbers on the walls of the Town Hall.

The first portion of the name—meaning "monster"—was probably applied because of the large perforated leaves and the bizarre effect created by the aerial roots. The second, doubtless refers to the flavour of the ripe fruits which are said to taste like tropical fruit salad with pineapple and banana flavours predominating.

The cover illustration shows portion of a plant growing in half a 44-gallon drum. It is protected from the afternoon sun by a fig tree, but is completely unprotected during the winter. Although it is a tropical plant, it suffered from our summer heat when unshaded.

The soil preparation consisted of approximately equal parts of sand, loam and compost with a little blood and bone manure. Subsequent treatments consisted of top-dressing with a compost and a small quantity of blood and bone.

The "flowers" are similar to those of the arum lily but are pale yellow in colour. The boat-shaped spathe encloses a green spadix which develops into a fruit about 10in. long and 2½in. in diameter at the base. The fruit is covered with hexagonal scales.

In the case of the specimen photographed, the first fruits—four in number—appeared during the third year after planting. Three of them are seen on the plant in the left and central portion of the picture. This year, ten fruits appeared and these may be seen as buds, flowers and fruits in the foreground.

The flowers appeared during late March and April and the fruit matured after being approximately 13 months on the plant. The first sign of maturity was the tendency of the outer edges of the scales to turn upward. The first fruit picked weighed 1½lb. and, excluding the stalk, had a length of 11in.

This fruit was wrapped in brown paper and placed on a pantry shelf to ripen. Within three days, the lower portion—approximately half the fruit—was fully ripe. The hexagonal scales lifted freely, revealing the closely-packed hexagonal sections of pulp attached lightly to a central core. The remainder ripened two days later.

SPECIMENS HELP DIAGNOSIS

WRITTEN descriptions of plant diseases are often insufficient for accurate diagnosis. Send specimens, preferably several, showing the disease at various stages. They will usually carry well if wrapped in moist newspapers and enclosed in well-ventilated containers.

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