

The secret life of plants



Mammillaria Cactus: Southern origin (Mexico)



Hibiscus: Southern US species



Old Man's Beard: Mexican cactus

By GRAHAM THOMPSON

When York erected the greenhouse attached to the Farquharson Life Sciences Building in 1965, they forgot that the sun rises in the East and sets in the West. As a result, the building, which is sloped to the North and South, admits less sunlight than it should.

York biologist Dr. Michael Boyer says they compensate for this problem by facing the hardier tropical flora to the North and the plants requiring more sunlight, such as cacti, towards the South.

Boyer says the greenhouse was originally conceived as a research aid, but because of its unstable climatic conditions it is now primarily used for teaching. The building houses plants used mostly by biology undergraduates and natural science students.

There are more than 400 varieties of plants representing most areas of the world, says Boyer.

The greenhouse keeper also grows plants sold at cost to the various University departments. The most popular are those with variegated leaves, but they must be able to stand the University's poor lighting and dry conditions, Boyer says.

The greenhouse is open to the public any day except Thursday when it is sprayed to keep insects under control. The worst offender is the relentless spider mouse, Boyer says.



Fan Palm: Tropical, Pacific-rim



Sedum: Worldwide—dry, rocky areas



Whisk Broom: Southern origin