

No Greenhouse! No Lath House!

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I have Nature's lath house: A large grapefruit tree that serves as greenhouse and lath house. It provides naturally filtered sun and shade, and protection from the cold. Only a few extremely frost tender succulents need extra protection during freezing temperatures. It seems to be a great place for my plants.

I water my plants during the summer once a week—with the exception of the *Msembryanthemums*. Well, I should say in particular the *M. fesestraria* and *M. nananthus*. I kept losing them until I began their dry period in about May, and didn't water again until it cooled off. I think that was because of the heat out there. In the winter, I give them a little drink, about twice a month, but let all others have their rest period, which is the hardest thing in the world for me to do. I am considering experimenting with a few plants and watering them once or twice a month during the winter to see what happens. The succulents get water all winter, but not nearly as often in the summer.

The succulents are on the patio, and actually, at times, it appears it might not be enough light for them. Off and on during the day, the sun falls on each and every one many times.

The plants are all in pots, and because of irrigation, they have to be elevated. For three or four years, I had various and sundry tables around the tree for the cacti, but a dear son-in-law designed and constructed a round table to fit around the trunk of the tree. He, my daughter, and youngest grandson loaded it in sections into their VW bus and brought it over last summer from California. They assembled it around the tree, waist high, with the legs held in place in cement so it is solid and substantial. It has certainly been a delight for me ever since.

My tree not only takes care of my plants, but also is a choice place for hummingbirds to build their nests. Every spring I have from one to three nests over the patio, and have the extreme delight of watching the babies leave the nests. It is a busy and worrisome time for me as I'm much more concerned over their welfare than their mothers are! The nests are built on the very ends of the branches so when the winds buffet them around, I keep praying they are "digging their toenails" in, and when it rains I have to suppress the desire to hold an umbrella over them. My husband assures me that this nesting procedure has been going on for centuries without my supervision, but I'm still not convinced!

So, my small world under my Nature's lath house is both satisfying and serene.