

The Nearing Frame *by Tim Jennings*

Over 70 years ago, Dr. George Guy Nearing designed and built a simple but effective frame for propagation. Called the Nearing Frame, its primary purpose was for rooting *Rhododendron* cuttings. At that time, this task was nearly impossible because of the lack of knowledge about automated mist systems and rooting hormones. Today, many home gardeners and professionals alike are looking at this frame for its potential use in propagation.

A brief look at Dr. Nearing's life shows a man with great enthusiasm for

nature. Even as a boy, accounts tell of him roaming the countryside examining and collecting plants. As you will see, he would need all this energy through a lifetime of setbacks. In 1905, he attended the University of Pennsylvania where his brilliance soon drew the attention of many, not only scholastically but also athletically. It seems he would have become an Olympic finalist but then came the first of many fights with blindness that would last for decades. Accounts tell of Nearing's mother read-

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ing assignments so he could finish his schooling. He would later open his own hybridizing business. Today, many of his hybrids are still standing the test of time.

Nearing's solution to propagating rhododendrons was to build a frame enclosed by a hood that allowed maximum sky light but prevented direct sunlight from entering the frame. By placing the open part of the hood directly north, he created the ideal conditions for the propagation of many plants. A modified version of this frame is suitable for even the smallest of gardens, and can easily be constructed over a weekend. The frame itself measures only 24 inches by 18 inches deep, and stands about 49 inches high. It is made out of one sheet of three-quarter-inch outdoor plywood.

To make one, draw the pattern onto the plywood according to the cutting diagram below, and cut out the pieces. Next paint these pieces with two coats of Cuprinol, a wood preservative safe for plants. Be sure to coat both sides as well as the edges exposed by the cutting process. Once dry, paint these same pieces with two coats of glossy white out-

door paint. Again, paint both sides as this will allow for the maximum amount of reflected light. Now assemble the pieces with 1¼-inch galvanized brads. It is helpful to have another set of hands at this stage to hold things together while nailing. Finally, drill approximately 12 one-quarter-inch holes in the bottom to allow for drainage. That's it for the construction.

Using the frame is almost as simple. You must first site the frame so that the open part of the hood faces as close to north as possible. This may take a day or two of moving the frame while watching the sun's angle, especially in the morning and again in the evening. Once in place, you will want to bury the box portion of the frame three-quarters of the way into the ground. This will help keep the frame cool in summer. You will also need a piece of glass or Plexiglas for the top of the box to keep in the humidity. All that is left is to place the propagation media, already moist, into the box. You will want to keep this medium moist at all times, so watch your box for a week or so; once established, you will find it needs only minor attention. If you are like me, you will find many uses for this

frame, including rooting cuttings of woody plants and herbaceous perennials. It also works well as a place to set your newly sown pots of seeds.

Well, once again the past comes back to help rather than hinder us! How could such an idea as simple as this sit dormant for so many years? We can only wonder what else is out there, awaiting revival. Good luck; I look forward to hearing about your results with the Nearing Frame.

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Cutting Layout

To cut the following pieces from one sheet of three-quarter-inch outdoor plywood (8' x 4') lay them out as shown.

1. Top: 2' x 3'3"
2. Sides: 2' x 3'9"
3. Bottom: 1'11¼" x 1'5½"
4. Back: 1'11¼" x 1'3"
5. Front: 1'11¼" x 1'0"

