Local gardener turns bagasse into potting soil

By AL ALLEMAN

A Louisiana agricultural by-product that has largely gone to waste in the past is now being manufactured into potting soil with many advantages over competitive materials that have been on the market for years past, says its producer.

The product goes by the name of Bayou Potting Soil. It is manufactured from bagasse which is the stalk of sugar cane after it has been crushed to remove the cane juice for the manufacture of sugar. The soil is developed by George E. Campbell of Baton Rouge. Campbell is a gardener of sorts, but he lays no claim to being a master gardener. However, in his gardening at home, he has been shocked at the cost of peat moss — a material that has long been used as a soil additive in growing plants.

Campbell uses as a soil additive in growing plants the following additional properties of their plants. There were complaints that fresh bagasse contained a residue of sugar and attracted ants.

The materials Campbell uses is 8 to 10 years old. It has been exposed to the elements and the sugar content has washed away, so his product does not attract ants.

While on the subject of pests in connection with the use of the product, an interesting but unexplained side effect should be mentioned. That relates to cats. Cats naturally like litter. Frequently, they have been known to dig into potting soil and garden pots to take care of nature's needs. For some unknown reason cats avoid bagasse potting soil.

So, if you have cats and want to grow pot plants, it's perfectly safe with this material. Campbell observes, but offers no explanation for the situation.

The material is not exactly inert. It does carry some plant nutrients. In fact, according to Campbell, plants newly set out in the mixture will thrive without supplemental feeding for about three months. After that, a fertilizer program should be used just as you would with any other growing medium.

Campbell also says that his material is good for the sprouting of seeds. He says that seed planted in small pots have a good percentage of germination and don't have to be fertilized prior to being transplanted into the garden. Persumably there will be no damp-off problem and certainly no weeds sprouting among seedlings.

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The material seems to be excellent for any kind of plant, whether ornamental or vegetable. Campbell reports he has known vegetable growers to produce finer products with the addition of Bayou Potting Soil than they did without it.

According to claims made by Bayou State Agricultural, Inc., the product has the following additional properties.

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