

GROWING PLANTS IN POTS AND BOXES . . .

On no account should a compost be used when it is sticky or an attempt be made to wet a dry one by watering after it has been used.

If the compost is too wet, it should be spread out under cover, covered with sheets of newspaper, and left until it has dried out sufficiently. If too dry, it is best moistened by spreading out in a thin layer, sprinkling with a watering-can fitted with a rose or a syringe, and adding another layer of compost, sprinkling again, and so on, finally covering the heap with clean sacking. This method ensures a uniform wetting of the heap, which should be ready for use the following day.

Soil which has been sterilised may be kept for three or four months, providing it is not more moist than "potting condition," the heap is loose, not trodden, and not too large.

On the other hand mixed composts

should be used within a few weeks, and should not, in any case, be kept for more than two months before being used, as compost deteriorates slowly in storage and becomes acid.

Sale of Prepared Compost

The instructions for preparing seed-sowing and potting composts according to the John Innes specifications will no doubt sound highly complicated to home gardeners who are not familiar with the work. Those who have actually done it will agree, however, that it is not really difficult to prepare these composts correctly if the instructions are closely followed, and all who have used the composts speak enthusiastically about the results they have achieved by growing plants in them.

It is rather surprising, however, that seedsmen do not offer these composts ready mixed for sale more often to customers who want only small quan-

ties which it would not be worth their while to prepare themselves. A bushel of compost will go a long way in a home garden, and a quarter of a bushel would be enough for most home gardeners for the annual re-potting of their home plants.

The cost of this compost would be small compared with the added enjoyment which really well-grown plants will give. There seems an opening for nurserymen who already mix John Innes composts for their own use to supply some to the retailer. Compost to be offered for sale in this way should be stored in much drier than "potting condition," as it will then deteriorate less if not sold at once.

Summary

Best results are obtained if boxed and potted plants are grown in prepared "composts" made from sterilised soil to which other ingredients, including fertilisers, have been added in the correct proportions. Two types of composts are desirable, one for seedlings and one for potting; but nearly all plants in which the home gardener is interested can be grown successfully in one or other of these.

It is well worth while to go to the trouble of preparing the composts correctly to give best results and to reduce the chances of failures.

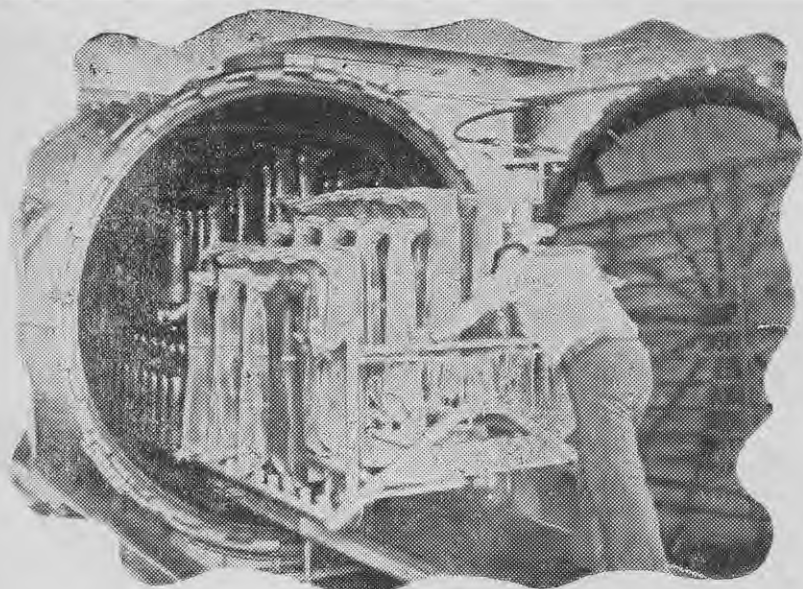
For commercial growers the advantage of using the seed-sowing compost for sowing and pricking out bedding plants is that a healthy, uniform line of plants is produced and no time will be lost in disease control or in weeding boxes. Moreover, plants will continue growing in the recommended compost for longer than in less suitable ones, and are thus in saleable condition for a longer period. In timing seed sowing, however, it should be borne in mind that plants usually reach saleable size a few days sooner than usual when grown in the John Innes seed-sowing compost.

It is understood that 60 per cent. of British nurserymen are now using the John Innes composts. One said recently: "We did not know until using these composts just how well plants can grow."

Recommended Reading

Those who wish to follow the whole fascinating story of the John Innes Horticultural Institution's investigations are recommended to read "Seed and Potting Composts," by W. J. C. Lawrence and J. Newell, published by George Allen and Unwin, price about 8s. 6d. in New Zealand. Every commercial nurseryman and home gardeners interested in raising seedlings and pot plants should read this book, which was revised and republished in 1942.

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