

Midsummer Neglect can Rob the Flower Gardener of his Rewards

By M. J. BARNETT,
Director of Reserves to the
Christchurch City Council.

A SURVEY of activities in the average New Zealand garden would show that the advent of spring brought a general and instinctive desire to plant, to sow, and to put the garden in order. Usually this activity is maintained fairly constantly throughout the succeeding months up to the summer holiday season, but when midsummer arrives the school vacations and annual leave make a break in the well-ordered and regular routine work of the garden, with the result that it is likely to be neglected, for the time being at least. Lawns go unmown, weeds grow apace, choice plants languish for the want of timely attention or support, beds and borders become untidy, and there is a general air of neglect.

STRANGE as it may seem, this temporary state of affairs has a disheartening effect on all but the genuinely interested gardeners. Apparently, once the interest is allowed to flag, reviving it again is difficult. Perhaps the enticements of the seaside, the country, and outdoor games outweigh the more passive pleasures of horticulture. While summer attractions are made the most of, an active interest in the garden should be maintained, for only by sustained activity will lasting enjoyment be obtained from it. The more effort is lavished on it, the more it will flourish and induce that sense of satisfaction and pride in achievement—"the sweet solace of labour"—which is the recompense of those who make their gardening "a labour of love." The attitude that autumn is approaching and that matters will be put to rights when more time is available can lead to the garden becoming master of the gardener.

Though by January most planting will have been completed, beds and borders will be well filled with flowering plants, there will be little sowing of seed to be done, and shrubs will require little attention, nevertheless much routine work and general maintenance is required.

Roses

The first crop of rose blooms will be over, and as a preventive against attacks of mildew, rust, and black spot the bushes should be sprayed with an approved fungicide at least twice before the second crop of flower buds begins to show colour; full instructions were given in the October "Journal."

The summer pruning of rose bushes should be attended to immediately the



[Jack Welsh and Sons photo.]
Care of rock gardens at this time of year includes removing spent flowers not required for seed and ensuring that robustly growing plants do not smother less-vigorous plants.

first crop of bloom is over. Summer pruning consists of removing the weaker growths that have already flowered and are not sufficiently strong to warrant their being retained for future growth, and of shortening back the stronger growths that have bloomed. These growths should not be pruned severely, but merely cut back to two or three growth buds below the spent flower stem. Growth out of proportion with the rest may be cut back a little harder to improve the general habit and appearance of the bushes.

The tying in of strong young growths of climbing and rambler roses required to replace old and worn-out stems should be continued. The old stems should be removed later when the annual pruning is attended to.

Lilies

Both *Lilium candidum*, better known as the Christmas or madonna lily, and *Lilium testaceum*, the Nankeen lily, will have finished flowering by the middle of January, and the old flower stems should be cut off at ground level and burnt. The dreaded botrytis disease which frequently affects lilies, particularly the two species mentioned, may be present in a resting form in spent leaves and stems, and if infected material is added to the compost heap, the chances are that the disease will be spread to other parts of the garden with the compost.

Unlike most lilies, neither *Lilium candidum* nor *L. testaceum* has a distinct dormant period, for no sooner is their flowering period over than fresh growth from the bulbs is developed in the form of radical leaves at ground level. Therefore, if dividing the

bulbs or shifting them to fresh sites is necessary, this work should be done toward the end of January.

Both kinds succeed best in a deep, reasonably rich, well-drained soil which is always in good mechanical condition—that is, a soil which does not cohere into a sticky mass when wet or into hard lumps when dry. That is one of the reasons why many lilies succeed better when planted adjacent to certain shrubs, such as azaleas and rhododendrons. Not only do these shrubs prefer similar soil conditions, but the innumerable fibrous roots from them assist materially in keeping the soil friable for the lilies. Both the species mentioned are very susceptible to the effects of cold currents of air, so it is essential that they be planted in positions where they are protected from cold draughts and biting winds.

Lawns

By January the growth of grass will have steadied considerably and, if need be, the grass catcher on the lawn mower can be dispensed with. However, regular mowing should be continued. Too frequently this work tends to be curtailed as the grass becomes less vigorous in its growth, with the result that the bents—the flower stalks of the grass—are enabled to develop to such a length that the mower cannot remove them. The smooth, inviting aspect of a lawn can be spoiled by grass stalks sticking up indiscriminately throughout its surface.

In many districts on the lighter soils, and where summer brings dry conditions, lawns quickly show signs of browning off, and if adequate water is not applied, in time they suffer to