

Annuals of many kinds can be sown in February in the cooler districts to winter as small plants and make a worthwhile display in spring.

Ashes accumulate rapidly in most households. Wood ashes are a valuable source of plant foods, especially potash, and where wood is the main fuel used for domestic heating the ashes should never be wasted. They should be stored in a dry place and applied to the soil whenever it is dug over; put day by day on some part of the garden not carrying a crop and allowed to wash into the soil; or, best of all, put on the compost heap each day. The lime in the ashes will benefit the compost and the plant foods ultimately will be returned to the soil when dressings of compost are put on the garden. If wood ashes are allowed to accumulate in some odd corner open to the weather, rain will dissolve and wash out most of the valuable ingredients, which will then be wasted. Buying of potash fertilisers should rarely be necessary in households using wood as the main fuel if the ashes are used in this way.

Coal ashes, on the other hand, should never be used in the garden. They contain practically no plant foods, but may contain a dangerous amount of boron—sufficient to cause damage to plants. Though boron is an essential plant food, it is required in only very small amounts, and regular dressings of coal ashes could build up the boron in the soil to a dangerous level. The dustbin is the best place for coal ashes.

Bowls of bulbs flowering in the house in spring always make a welcome addition to the display of pot plants and offer a reminder of the bulbs which will be flowering in the border a little later. Specially prepared bulb fibre, sold by seedsmen, should be used for bulbs in bowls without drainage holes, as soil goes sour under such conditions, but bulbs can be grown perfectly well in ordinary plant pots containing a potting soil, and lachenalias, freesias, and small bulbs in general will grow much better in soil than in fibre. After bulbs have been potted the containers should be stood, or sunk in soil to the rims, in the coolest, shadiest place available for about 6 weeks. They need watering from time to time and the soil must not be allowed to dry out. A good plan is to cover the pots with old sacks or with a few inches of sand or old fine cinders; this top layer helps to keep the pots cool and reduces drying out to a minimum, and the added weight prevents the bulbs from lifting themselves out of the soil as their roots grow. All the flowers in a bowl are rarely at their best at the same time; that can be overcome by planting all the bulbs about 3 in. apart in boxes, growing them in the usual way, and then digging them out and potting them up into bowls when the flower buds are showing clearly, matching the plants chosen for each bowl. Rather surprisingly, the bulbs do not seem to resent being transplanted in this way while in full growth, but they should be dug out of the boxes as carefully and with as many roots as possible.

Bulbs for spring flowering as a rule should be planted as early as possible. Early planting does not necessarily mean earlier flowering, as the varieties flower in roughly the same order and at about the same dates each season,

whether planted relatively early or late, but earliness of planting does affect the size and quality of the blooms, as the earlier-planted bulbs will develop larger root systems, better capable of producing large flowers and leaves, than will those planted later. A succession of flowers should be ensured by planting a range of varieties and not by planting one variety at intervals. Apart from the always-popular tulips, narcissi, hyacinths, freesias, and lachenalias (the last two will not stand very heavy frost), ixias and Dutch irises should be more widely planted to extend the bulb season into early summer. *Freesia burtoni*, a great improvement on the older types, has very fragrant, large flowers of beautiful form and texture; it cannot be raised true to name from seed.



Chrysanthemum Hon. Mrs. Helme Pott. The best-quality flowers cannot be obtained from chrysanthemums unless disbudding is carried out as described below.

Chrysanthemum disbudding is the removal of unwanted flower buds, usually the smaller ones, when they are not larger than about pea size, by pushing them gently sideways until they drop off. That operation results in larger flowers, as by removal of some of the buds a better supply of food is left for those that remain. On the other hand, heavy thinning of buds tends to shorten the total flowering period of any plant, as fewer flowers will remain to open after the first ones fade. Little disbudding need be done on chrysanthemums grown for garden display unless particularly fine individual blooms are wanted, when the central bud should be left. Some single varieties are best partly disbudded by having all but the top three or four buds on each stem removed, but many gardeners take the easy way and grow chrysanthemums as "sprays" (that is, with no flower buds removed), each stem bearing a succession of flowers, though they lack the size and substance of blooms from disbudded plants.

Cuttings of shrubs and many other plants put into a frame in January to root should be inspected regularly and sprayed with water daily to reduce wilting until the plants have developed roots of their own. Cuttings usually perk up and the leaves become fresh and crisp before the new roots grow, as the callus that forms over the end of a cutting can take in some water

from the soil. The first sign that the cuttings have formed new roots is when fresh green leaves start to develop in the centres of the plants. When the cuttings have rooted, the frame light should be left off and the young plants allowed to grow naturally until they can be planted out, either into an odd corner of the garden to grow on or directly into their permanent places. The sooner they are planted out the better, but delaying until autumn is often wiser than planting in the drier summer weather when each plant may need watering several times to keep it alive. The old saying "Plant when it is wet and sow when it is dry" contains much truth.

Everlasting flowers, though not very fashionable now, can be useful for decorating the home in the off season, especially in hilly inland districts where borders are flowerless in winter and there is no local shop to provide out-of-season flowers. Statice, helichrysum, rhodanthe (helipterum), and acroclinium all have flowers with hard, scaly petals that retain their colours when dry. They can all be grown as annuals by sowing seed in boxes in spring, growing the plants in boxes in a frame, and then planting them out in October or November, or by sowing the seeds outdoors in spring. The flowers should be cut when about half open with the longest possible stems, tied in bunches, and hung upside down in a shed out of sunlight and dust. The plants are left in this position until the stems have dried and stiffened so that the flower heads will not droop when they are arranged in vases, in which no water should be used. As soon as the stems are dry and stiff the bunches should be stored in a cardboard box until required. Honesty can also be used as an everlasting flower, but the plant is left untouched until the seed pods have ripened, as the silver "moons" for which it is grown are the central parts of the ripe seed boxes. Even larkspur flowers can be used by cutting the stems when the flowers are fully developed and drying them as described; the petals shrivel somewhat, but retain much of their colour. Though everlasting flowers can be kept for years, it is best to grow a new lot each season and to throw away the old ones when the spring flowers come in, as they are usually full of dust by that time.

Gladioli may be ready to lift in February in the northern, warmer districts, but elsewhere are only at their prime. The best time to lift them is about 6 weeks after the flowers have faded, and the best methods are to spread the entire plants out in shallow boxes or trays until the foliage has completely died down, or to hang them up in bunches in a dry, airy shed. The stems and leaves should not be cut off until they have quite died down and returned to the corm all the food materials which they contained when lifted.

Hedges of evergreen species should be given their last clipping before winter. They should then be reclothed with short new shoots before growth ceases and will look neat and tidy throughout winter. The secret of keeping hedges of reasonable size and pleasing appearance is to trim them often but lightly, as heavy cutting makes them unsightly and may spoil coniferous hedges by leaving bare places which never grow again.