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PLANTING AND PRUNING SHRUBS

IF properly planted, not one shrub out of twenty would die. Lets out the nurseryman doesn't it? That individual is usually made the scapegoat, to be sure; but if he is a reliable man, he may be trusted to send plants that will grow if given half a chance. His success lies in the customer's satisfaction. He simply can't afford to be deceitful or careless. This applies to established firms, with good rating and a reputation to sustain—the firms that advertise in the best magazines year after year. With fly-by-night concerns, the case is different; they should not be patronized. Likewise, traveling agents, unless they bring proper credentials from well known growers, should be shunned. If you pay them your good money, you probably will regret it.

When shrubs are shipped from the nurseries they are carefully wrapped in moss and burlap and can be sent across the continent. When the amateur purchaser gets his bundle, he usually rips it open to see what the plants look like. He leaves the roots exposed to the air until he gets ready to set out the shrubs. Then, he digs a hole, crowds in the roots, pours a pail of water over the earth and calls the job done.

Now, trees are living creatures and they need to be mighty robust to endure such treatment. Pretty often they die. They were not given a square deal. If they live, they are likely to be spindly and frail.

Most failures are due to one of three causes or to a combination of them all—letting the roots dry out, failure to cut back the top, and too deep planting. The shrubs may be kept safely for several days in the original package, if the roots are not exposed. If they are to be kept for some time before being planted, a trench should be dug and the plants set in it, very close together and slightly inclined toward the direction from which the sun shines, the roots being covered with earth. This is called "heeling in" and serves to keep the roots moist.

If there are several shrubs to be handled at planting time, it is well either to set them in a barrel of water or to dip the roots in a puddle of liquid mud, which will cake over them and prevent their being dried out by the wind.

MANY men get poor results because of their curious mania for deep planting. Generally, a ring on the stalk will show where the plant stood in reference to the surface of the ground when in the nursery. Let it go into the earth just deep enough to hide this ring under half an inch of soil.

Lifting a plant usually deprives it of half its root growth, and the top should be cut back accordingly. It is just as well, in fact, to have rather less top than root at the beginning. Cutting back to this extent may seem a drastic measure; but it really is of vital importance. The roots themselves should be trimmed smooth at the ends, if they have been broken off, and should be carefully spread out in a wide circle. This means, naturally, that a wide hole should be dug. To get the best results, the soil should be thoroughly dug over, just as if annual garden plants were to go into it. Well-rotted stable manure may also be worked in to provide additional plant food.

When the shrub has been set in the hole, the soil should be carefully worked in around the roots so as to leave no open spaces. The end of a lathe is excellent for pressing the soil into the interstices. When half full of earth, a pail of water may be poured in, not so much because water is needed by the plants as to firm the soil over the roots. When the hole has been entirely filled, the earth should be well compacted with a maul or the foot. A slight depression to hold the water may be left around each shrub.

Put into the ground after this manner, one need have little doubt about his shrubs living and prospering. And in all the essential features, the process to be followed in planting trees is the same. Most shrubs look best when massed, and should therefore be planted

thickly, and some of them removed when they get large enough to crowd each other. No sort of planting dresses up the home grounds to better advantage than shrubs, and fear of not making them live need deter no one from ordering a supply. The order should go in early, however. This very minute is none too early; for nurseries are busy places in the spring and mistakes may occur in a rush season.

AS for the pruning of shrubs, it is not so much a matter of how to do it as when. Many a garden lover has conscientiously gone over his choice shrubs every spring, and then has marvelled that they have failed to bloom except in a half-hearted way. The truth is, of course, that he has cut off a large proportion of the buds. All the shrubs that flower in the spring or early summer make that same summer the wood on which the next season's flowers are to be produced. It follows, then, that the lilacs, Japanese quince, bridal wreath, flowering currant, weigela, syringa and such early flowering plants should be trimmed immediately after they have blossomed. On the other hand, the late blooming kind like the hydrangea and althea (rose of Sharon) may be pruned in winter or spring.

In most cases, the trimming should not be severe. Some gardeners are too fond of the knife. Nipping of the branch ends is a common mistake. The real purpose should be first to cut out the old and dead wood, getting the pruning shears as close to the bottom of the plant as possible. Then, some of the new wood may be cut out, if necessary, and the branches trimmed back if they are growing out of bounds. Usually, very little of this work is needed.

The hydrangea, however, is somewhat of an exception to the general rule. This shrub may be cut freely to secure special results; it is one of the most obliging plants imaginable. If wanted for massing in a bed, it needs merely to be cut back almost to the ground. If a fine flowering specimen on the lawn is desired, it may be allowed to grow freely, and shaped to suit the owner's taste.

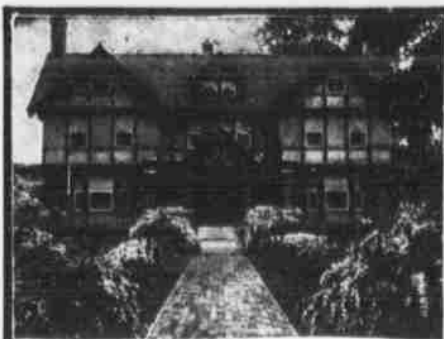
FLOWERS FOR PORCH AND WINDOW

WITH what high hopes do hundreds of flower lovers start porch and window boxes in the spring, only to see the plants wither and the flowers fade before the season has half gone by. And yet, it is possible to have a thrifty little garden on the porch or in the window until long after frost comes. To begin with, a strong box, fully eight inches deep, is needed. Many people err in using boxes that are too shallow and so dry out quickly. The box must be the garden. Well-rotted manure may be mixed with the soil, or a small amount of bone meal added. The third requirement is water in abundance. Soil in boxes dries out much more quickly than that in the garden and, if neglected, the plants will perish of thirst. Daily watering is needed if the box is in the sun.

When the middle of summer comes, window boxes that made a brave show up to that time begin to look seedy and forlorn. They need to be fed, and several light coats of manure will carry them nicely through the season. Or, the plants may be watered weekly with manure water the color of weak tea.

The geranium is well adapted to white houses of the conventional type, and variegated vinca supplants it well. Nasturtiums, too, look well with such a house. It often happens that a box filled with vines only is more attractive when used on a brick house than one boasting a profusion of flowers. Ivy and moneywort, like vinca, are good vines to grow. If the soil is made extra rich and the climbing nasturtiums used, there will be a wealth of foliage and not over-much bloom. Other good decorative trailers are Thunbergia, which grows rapidly and has many dark-eyed blossoms in buff, orange and white, and variegated Japanese hop.

Pansies may be grown in the porch and window box very early in the season, and later replaced with geraniums and other plants.



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