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GOLD FRAMES AND FLOWERS

THE very easiest way to have early flowers is to start the seeds in a cold frame. They will not be quite as early, perhaps, as if started in a hot bed; but they will be much in advance of those grown from seeds sown in the open ground. And the amount of labor required to make and to manage a cold frame is hardly worth speaking of.

By sowing seeds in the cold frame in March and April and re-planting in the open ground when the danger of frost is over, a very long season is made possible. Little drills about six inches apart, in which to put the seeds, may be made with a pointed stick or a pencil. The coarse seeds may be covered twice their depth; but the very fine ones should be simply pressed into the soil with the side of a board, or sown on the surface and a little very fine sand or sifted soil sprinkled over them.

Water should be given in a very fine spray, or by placing a strip of burlap over the seed bed and wetting that. An excess of water must be avoided, and it is best to keep the glass raised a crack all the time, and partly opened on warm days. The seedlings should be thinned and set into the open ground when danger of frost is over and the season well established; but first they should be hardened to the temperature of the outside world by giving more air daily until the glass is removed entirely.

AMONG the flowers that may be started to good advantage in a cold frame are the asters, the balsams, ageratum, cosmos, mignonette, nicotiana (sweet-scented tobacco), annual phlox, salvia, snapdragon, stocks, Sweet William, verbena, zinnias, salpiglossis, annual larkspur and Clarkia. Although the tubers of the dahlia are usually planted, it is entirely possible to have flowers the first year from seed. Growing dahlias in this way is always an interesting process, for one is never able to know in advance just what kind of flowers he is going to get. At any rate, it is pretty certain that he will have something entirely different from his neighbors. The single varieties are more often grown from seed, but the double sorts will flower if the seeds are sown in a frame in April.

Most of the flowers mentioned may be started outside and still have flowers before the season is over; but in order to get several kinds as early as they are wanted, it is a great advantage to use a cold frame. Many people buy their aster, ageratum and zinnia plants; but a cold frame is a decided saving and makes it possible for one to choose the varieties he or she most admires.

Some of the finest varieties of the cosmos bloom late, and when the seed is sown in the open ground they come into flower just in time to be nipped by the frost. Nicotiana is a strong growing plant, and if seeds are sown under glass early in April the fragrant blossoms will perfume the garden from early summer until the middle of October. Mignonette, too, another flower grown for its fragrance, may be enjoyed for a much longer time by starting the seeds in March instead of waiting until May, when they may be safely sown outside. The annual phlox is in the same class. The snapdragon, which is one of the most satisfactory flowers for the amateur's garden, and is fine for cutting, should by all means be started either in a cold frame or a hot bed.

Started plants of the good, old-time Sweet William may be purchased in the spring; but if seeds are sown early in the cold frames, the plants will flower the first year and last over. One of the best climbing vines is Cobaea scandens, or cups and saucer vine, which grows very rapidly and has splendid showy flowers. It is too tender to be started outside before May, so that if early flowers are wanted, the seeds must be sown under glass in March or April. They should always be placed in the ground edgewise, and merely covered with soil.

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