



# The Arboretum Bulletin



VOL V. No. 8

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

AUGUST, 1942

## *Flowers in the Home*

By PROF. H. B. DORNER

*Dept. of Floriculture, University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.*

THERE is no more pleasing ornament or decoration for the home than a few well-arranged flowers. Their beauty of form, their great and varied range of color, their freshness and their fragrance add much to the home life. Whether the flowers come from our own gardens or from the florist's shop, their real beauty is only fully appreciated when they are tastefully arranged. In this brief article I want to tell you about arranging flowers and to call your attention to some of the things that will help you secure the effects that you desire.

First, let us go into the garden or to the flower shop and select the flowers to be used. Our first consideration should be color because color and color harmony are the first things that will attract the attention. The flowers selected should harmonize with the furnishings of the room where they are to be used, if we wish to get the best effects. If they do not harmonize with them and if they do detract from the beauty of the room, then the selection is poor.

Whether they will last after being cut is another important factor. We must also determine whether the length of stem is sufficient to arrange them as we wish. If the flowers have disagreeable odors or have a fragrance too heavy for the house, they should be avoided.

After they are cut, plunge them deeply into a vessel of cool water for a half hour or more so that they may freshen up. This will make them easier to arrange, for the freshened flowers are stiff and will hold their position better.

Perhaps the flowers are to be selected for a certain container or perhaps the container is to be selected later. In either case it is an important item in good arrangement. Any bowl, glass, pitcher or fruit jar that is handy *may* do, but it is not in this way that *beautiful* effects are to be secured. A lady may wear a beautiful gown, but the entire effect will be spoiled if she wears with it a pair of run-down house slippers. So it is with beautiful flowers arranged in an undesirable receptacle.

The best containers to use are those that are inconspicuous, that blend into the arrangement and become a part of it without attracting undue attention. The best dressed person is best dressed because in the ensemble the individual items of his or her make-up do not attract special attention. Avoid the use of highly decorated pottery, metal containers with heavy decorations and deeply cut glass that reflects light from every facet. I am not criticizing these art objects, but I am criticizing their use as flower containers. If they are beautiful in themselves, their beauty should not be spoiled by adding flowers. Let us use them as decorative objects by themselves.

When using flowers as a decorative item, their beauty should *not* be detracted from. Color of the flower con-

tainer becomes important only when it clashes with the flowers. Neutral tones are the best to select since they can be used with practically all kinds of flowers. The shape and size of the container is also important and we therefore naturally select a different holder for nasturtiums and pansies than we do for long-stemmed roses or larkspur. Every flower lover should have a collection of receptacles suitable for different types of flowers. There are many excellent, inexpensive ones to be had.

I have mentioned color in relation to the home furnishings as being important when selecting flowers. Color harmony among the flowers themselves and within the arrangement, is also a prime consideration. Since color is the first thing to attract the attention, it is, therefore, of extreme importance to every one attempting to arrange flowers.

There are several ways in which one may secure color harmony in his or her arrangements. First, by contrast or by using a color and its complement, or opposite, such as red and green or yellow and violet. A cherry tree in fruit is handsome because of the red cherries among the green leaves. A yellow rose in the center of a bunch of violets also gives a harmonious contrast. The second method of color harmony is to use analagous or similar colors or those that are close together in the spectrum, such as scarlet, orange and yellow. A third method is by using all colors together but in equal proportion. If one color is used in greater quantity the harmony is destroyed. The use of tints or of shades together provides a fourth way of securing color harmony. The lighter the tints or the darker the shades, the more readily the colors blend. While we would not want to use red and yellow together, light pink and light yellow harmonize well.

Most people prefer harmonies of *warm* colors, or those from red through orange, yellow and yellow-green. These are sunshine colors and are cheerful. Blue-greens, blues, violet and purple are cold colors and make one think of ice and shadows. These latter colors are improved by the addition of their warm complements.

Perhaps I have spent too much time discussing color when you are more anxious to know how the designer in your favorite flower shop develops the beautiful flower arrangements that you admire so much. He has, of course, taken into consideration the selection of the proper vase or bowl and the proper combinations of colors.

Let us visit him in his shop and see how he does it. First let us see how he manages to keep each flower in the position in which he places it. You remember how they fall over for you. If it is a flat bowl and the water is to show, he must of necessity select a block or holder to keep the flowers in position. In selecting such a fixture he prefers one where there is a possibility of variation in arrangement such as with the Dazey holder. Holders made of strips of sheet lead are also good where the flowers are heavy. Most pottery and glass holders, the designer tells us, are better

suiting as missiles to throw at the yowling cat than for the holding of flowers. There is no flexibility in them, since each flower stem must fit into a fixed hole.

But let us see what he is using in his bowls and vases. Here he has a bowl with some kind of wire material in it. We pull it out and we find that it is just a piece of chicken netting, such as is used for chicken-yard fences, crumpled up to fit into the bowl. As the flowers are placed in position, the stems pass down between the wires and are held in place. This makes an ideal holder as it is permanent. It may be used over and over and it does not dirty the water.

Beside this bowl are several others ready to receive the flowers, but there are no wire holders in them. The first is filled with pieces of evergreen set upright and clipped off even with the top of the container. The next one has branched twigs of some shrub set into the bowl in the same manner. As this is summer time, most of the leaves were first stripped from the twigs so that they would not decay in the water. The evergreen is best, where it is available, as it will remain in the water for many days without fouling. In the winter the bare twigs of shrubs are used. As the flower stems pass down among the twigs, they again are held in place.

Let us watch the designer for a moment as he inserts the flowers. Notice that he makes a slanting cut at the base of each stem before he inserts it into the bowl. No, this is not to make the stem take up water better but to make a wedge at the base so that it will pass more readily down among the wires or twigs.

Over on this other table are some completed flower arrangements. Let us look them over. The first thing to attract the attention is that none of them is crowded and that every flower shows to the best advantage. Every flower has its own definite form or shape that is likely to be lost when the blooms are crowded together. A definite rule then, in arranging flowers, is to preserve their individuality.

Notice this vase of a dozen roses. Yes, it looks different from that last one that you arranged. What has he done to it? Your arrangement was even across the top because the stems were all of an even length and this was because you hated to shorten the stems. The designer got an up and down arrangement by cutting the stems to uneven lengths. The result is a more loose, irregular arrangement that also displays the individual blooms to a better advantage.

Also notice that the designer never uses two flowers of similar size and form together, such as roses with carnations. He has used small flowers with the large ones, as in this centerpiece of roses and baby's breath and this other one of carnations and larkspur.

The designer is now making up a beautiful arrangement for a dinner table. It is in tones of yellow but notice how the colors are grouped and blended. He is not altogether pleased as the color scheme is a little dull and so he is adding some white colors. See how the rich yellow tones are brought out by the addition of the white. Now he is adding a small group of blue flowers for contrast, blue being the complement of yellow. Grouping of colors is always better than mixing them.

You say that you are interested in flower arrangements for the dinner table? If so, there are a few things that you should always keep in mind. A centerpiece should never be so large that it makes the table look crowded nor should it ever interfere with the service. The main thing, however, is to see that it does not interfere with the pleasure of your guest. A table decoration that does not permit you to see the person on the opposite side of the table is an abomination. Fifteen inches is the maximum height for a centerpiece. If it must be higher, then it must be high enough

so that the guests can see under it but such an arrangement always looks top-heavy.

Notice the vase of pink zinnias. Notice again how the white heightens and brightens the pink tones. During the next chrysanthemum season try some white pompoms among the pink and yellow ones and notice the difference.

If your dinner is an evening one, candles to harmonize with your flower colors may be used. Candles, however, do not belong to a luncheon table. Luncheon table decorations should be simple and not elaborate, as for a dinner.

Just a word concerning the care of your flowers. Most flowers that have stems which are inclined to be hard or woody have a tendency to wilt. This can be overcome by clipping a quarter inch off the end of the stem while holding it under water. This prevents air from entering the water pores and the water column remains unbroken. Flowers, such as lilacs, roses or chrysanthemums, that begin to wilt after being in water for some time will benefit by the same treatment.

Avoid the use of chemicals such as aspirin, salt and sugar in the water as they have no influence upon the keeping qualities of the flowers. Clear water is best. Temperature is the main factor regulating the length of life of a flower. Placing the flowers in a cool place at night and keeping them out of drafts will make them last longer.

### Comments on Rock Gardening

By JOHN H. HANLEY

(Continued from July)

FOR the guidance of new enthusiasts, Mr. Hanley, in this installment, goes on to present the underlying reasons for the existence of rock gardens.

First, we must assume that the most important of the two motives places the use of rocks secondary and subsidiary to the development of the plant. The rock garden is therefore a place to grow plants and not a place to display boulders for their sakes alone. These statements further imply that the rock has a definite utility value. It is valuable in several ways. (1) It becomes the background for the plant. Thus the rocks taken as a whole, and acting as they do as minor backgrounds for the plants, become the minor background for the entire garden. (2) Furthermore, the rock functions in a much more direct way by setting up a more favorable condition for the growth of the plant. Most everyone has gone into a field in midsummer and, upon turning up a boulder, has observed that beneath it the soil is moist and cool. The stone has interposed itself between sun and soil and has acted as an insulator for the soil's surface against the sun's heat. It has checked the upward flow of soil moisture by capillarity and, instead of permitting it to evaporate, has held it in store so that the roots which extend under the stone may take advantage of it. An alpine plant with its roots reaching far back into such a region of coolness and moisture is able to grow and thrive whereas the same plant, if used in the open border where the soil is exposed to the hot rays of the sun, and where evaporation is allowed to go on unchecked, would have far less chance to survive.

In the natural alpine habitat the rocks perform another service. Water from the melting snow picks up and transports various organic materials, such as leaves and other decaying plant parts. As the water subsides and sinks downward the rocks act as filters (in a rough way) and collect this organic material in the crevices around them. Such material continues to decompose, furnishing needed plant foods, and it also has a very high absorptive ability so that it is able to take up and hold a great deal of water for long periods. Thus the rocks help to create optimum conditions for the growth of the alpine species.

The second implication that is emphasized by the aforementioned fundamental principles of rock gardening is that such gardens *must* be very natural and informal. This is indeed an unfortunate circumstance that is difficult to counteract when planning a rockery on a small city property. Cities are most often laid out on strictly formal lines. That is, they are designed in straight lines or appear in a combination of regular, methodical, geometric figures. Thus the accomplishment of isolation to any degree is rendered almost impossible. Why is it necessary that the rockery be secluded and isolated? For the reason that, without complete isolation, all conception of the natural feature which one has tried to duplicate is lost. A natural, informal garden cannot be placed among all these regular, methodical features without appearing out of place. In order to alleviate such a situation one should attempt to isolate the rockery by planting trees and/or shrubs around its perimeter in order to hide it as much as possible from the surroundings.

From these remarks it also follows that one should not attempt to imitate extreme natural features on small properties. Simplicity should be the rule in any garden; it is even more important on the small city lot. Where one is not limited by lack of space and where one finds natural features such as swales, streams, hills or ridges already in existence then it is possible to use the more complex designs. They will fit themselves better to the allotted space.

You may feel that this discussion advises the elimination of all rock gardens on city properties; that is not so. But you understand that with such a property there are very definite limitations and that to attain the most pleasing results one should avoid the extremes and make use of simple designs. A well-cared-for simple garden will be much more attractive than those of most extreme design—those which are difficult to care for and which do not fit the surroundings.

#### *Late Summer and Fall Seed Sowing*

MANY perennials and biennials will be much more satisfactory if the seeds are sown in the late summer and fall so that the young plants can be well developed before winter. This will enable them to get a fine start in the spring since they can go into active growth as soon as the weather moderates.

Additional advantage is to be gained in the case of particular perennials. The seeds of delphiniums and hollyhocks, for example, will give a much better germination if sown *immediately* after they have been collected, cleaned and dried for about a week. If they are not handled this way, they go into a natural dormant period which is hard to break.

In the case of delphiniums it is necessary to place the seeds in a refrigerator and hold them there for from two to four weeks in order to prepare them for reasonably rapid and complete germination unless they are sown when they are freshly collected. Seeds that are purchased during the winter season should always be given the cold treatment.

In the milder regions late summer and fall seed sowings of perennials and biennials can be made directly in the garden but even under these less severe conditions it is safest to handle them in well-prepared soil in a cold frame. Much better specimens of biennials, such as foxglove and canterbury bell, can be obtained if the seeding is done at this season. The young plants will need the winter protection that a cold frame affords in areas where winter temperatures are low. In such regions there is an alternative method that can be employed—starting the seeds indoors in January or February if a small greenhouse is available.

Both these methods have been checked against spring sowing and substantial differences in favor of the fall or

winter-sown seed always resulted. The use of a protective cold frame will probably be the most convenient method for the average gardener to use.

The soil should be light; a mixture of one-third sand, one-third loam and one-third leaf mold screened through one-fourth inch mesh is a good general type. Handle the seeds just as you ordinarily would; do not plant them too deep and keep the surface of the soil constantly moist, but not soaking wet.

Columbine seed should also be planted now while it is fresh, and remember that this is the time to start pansies for next summer's display.

#### *Visitors to the Arboretum*

DURING the month of August we were happy to entertain at the Arboretum Dr. E. L. Overholser, head of the Department of Horticulture at Washington State College. Dr. Overholser has been a member of the Arboretum Advisory Council for the past several years and has demonstrated a very real interest in what we are doing with ornamental plants. We feel particularly fortunate in having available to us the constructive criticisms of such a capable man.

Mr. William H. Judd, propagator at the famous Arnold Arboretum which is operated in connection with Harvard University, was an enthusiastic visitor in early August. Mr. Judd has elicited a very real interest in the progress we are making with the development of our Arboretum and has left with us much real encouragement to carry on the work that has been so well started. His heartening remarks, made at the regular August meeting of the Arboretum Board of Directors, were very well received. While here, he visited many nurseries, private gardens and public parks and, by his own admission, he carries away from the Pacific Northwest a firm conviction of the tremendous potentialities which exist here.

#### *Notes on Interesting Plants*

MR. CARL ENGLISH, JR., one of our very well-known plantsmen, waxes very enthusiastic over the spike broom, *Cytisus nigricans*. He has a number of specimens in his plantings at the Ballard Locks. One of them was in full bloom as late as August 12, although most of them seem to produce the bulk of their flowers in late June and July. The spike broom is a very graceful shrub which is perfectly hardy here in the Northwest. Mr. English explains that it does not like transplanting. The beautiful, abundant, golden-yellow spikes of flowers are extremely attractive.

Probably the largest specimen of *Abies pinsapo* (the Spanish fir) that we have encountered is located on the campus of the University of Washington. It grows just off the sidewalk near the southwest corner of Education Hall and if you are not familiar with the rigid beauty of this excellent conifer, a trip to the location would be well worth while.

#### *Fall Blooming Dogwood*

THREE years ago, we reported the apparent existence of definitely distinct strains of the western dogwood, *Cornus Nuttallii*. Our observations since that time tend to confirm that idea. For example, there is in full bloom now at the head of Rhododendron Glen, in the Arboretum, a specimen which has produced practically its whole crop of flowers in late August and September for four successive years. In reality this is but one of several which have demonstrated a similar consistency in the time of bloom. Mr. William H. Judd of Arnold Arboretum suggests that with this amount of evidence, we would be justified in proclaiming this form to be a distinct variety.

THE ARBORETUM BULLETIN  
*Published by the*  
Arboretum Foundation, 5532 White Building  
SEATTLE

Sec. 562, P. L. & R.