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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, December 3, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The calendar says December. But the mailbag still brings in questions about the garden. One letter this week asks how to protect roses from winter injury. Another wants to know how to keep evergreens safe from sunscald in winter. Then, here's a letter asking whether fall or spring is the best time to get a garden patch ready for next year's vegetables. And finally, here's a question about growing that lovely and popular flower--the white, fragrant gardenia.

Let's take these questions, one by one, with the answers from scientists in the Bureau of Plant Industry.

The first question is: "What is the best way to protect rose bushes against winter injury?"

That depends on the variety of rose and the winter climate. Hardy native roses like the wild rose of the Northeast, or the Prairie rose, the sweetbrier, or the Carolina or the Arkansas rose--these varieties need little or no covering for their winter sleep. But in the northern half of the United States most climbing varieties, and most of the tender roses for cutting need some help to carry them through the ice and snow, and the alternate freezing and thawing of the late winter. That's what really does damage to your bushes--including the heaving of the ground that comes with freezing and thawing. It pushes the bush out of the ground and may break the roots.

To prevent such damage, bank up earth to about a foot or more around each bush. Use about a bushel of friable soil for each bush. This mound will turn off

water that might stand in a frozen pool around the roots. Put a cover of coarse manure, straw or leaves over that mound of earth as soon as the earth freezes.

You may wonder why a mound of soil is better than a pile of leaves or manure around the rose bush. One reason is that rodents are likely to get into the leaves or strawy manure and nibble the bark of the rose bush during the winter.

Evergreen boughs and other tree branches hold the manure or straw in place in the rose garden and offer some protection, too. But even this may not be enough to protect very tender rose bushes. Delicate varieties up North may need a wrapping of straw and burlap.

As for climbing roses, they also need special protection in northern States. You can wrap the vines in straw, but that doesn't look very pretty. Another method is to lay the vines down on the ground, cover them with earth, and lay on straw or manure as soon as the earth freezes.

Now for the second question: "How can I protect evergreens against sunscald this winter?"

Evergreens that turn brown from "sunscald" or "winter killing" may actually die of thirst. When the ground around their roots freezes so they can't draw up moisture for their leaves or needles while the winter wind or sun dries them--- that's when evergreens suffer. To protect any kind of evergreen give it plenty of water during the fall. Then see that the ground underneath is well covered with mulch to prevent deep freezing. Broadleaved evergreens like the rhododendron need special protection against wind and sun in winter. Put up a fence or a windbreak of pine boughs, or wrap the plants in straw or burlap during the late winter. Whenever a warm spell sets in during the winter, and rainfall is deficient, water the ground if it is not frozen so the evergreens can get a good drink to carry them along.

Now here's an inquiry from a gardener already making plans for growing next year's vegetables. He asks: "Shall I spade the ground now and put in manure, or wait until spring?"

Fall is the time to work manure into the garden. Whether you plow or spade the ground now or in the spring depends on the kind of soil you have. Heavy clay, or sod, or soil out of cultivation for some time will benefit by being broken up and exposed to the freezing and thawing. But light or sandy soil, plowed in the fall, may wash or blow away with winter wind and rain. One good plan is to plow your land in the fall, sow rye on it, and then turn the rye under in the spring. Rye used in this way is often spoken of as a "green manure" crop.

So much for the vegetable garden. Now to answer a letter from a lady with a gardenia. She writes: "My gardenia plant never blooms. Buds form on it, but they drop off. The plant seems to be perfectly healthy. The leaves are shiny dark green. No signs of insects or disease. What could make the buds drop?"

Plant specialists say bud drop is one of the difficult problems of growing gardenias. Many things can cause it. Buds drop if the plant has too little light; too much or too little moisture; or sudden changes in temperature. If your house in the winter is around 70 degrees in the daytime but drops way down below 50 at night, that change in temperature may cause your gardenia buds to drop. Gardenias need plenty of light; soil and atmosphere evenly warm and evenly moist; and good drainage. Plant specialists suggest, too, that gardenias bloom better if you allow only one bud to grow on a shoot.

By the way, you are welcome to the brand new leaflet on gardenias, just published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Send a postcard for Leaflet No. 199 called "Gardenia Culture." Once more: Leaflet No. 199--Gardenia Culture--Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. The leaflet is free as long as the free supply lasts.

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