

About the Farm

English Experts on Sweet Peas

Pending the arrival of the new Sweet Pea Annual, with its list of varieties declared the "bests of their colors," by the Floral Committee of the National Sweet Pea Society, says an English writer in the "Chronicle." I have been making an inquiry among the leading growers for their opinions on the finest exhibition and garden varieties for growing in 1916. To the novice such an investigation would be full of bewildering experiences; for, apart from a natural prejudice in favor of varieties which he himself may have raised, each sweet pea expert will be found invariably on nine points out of ten strongly opposed to every other sweet pea expert.

I suppose there are no names better known in the sweet pea world than those of Eckford, Dobbie, Unwin, and Carter. Well, I asked the chief sweet pea specialists of Messrs. Henry Eckford of Wem, of Messrs. James Carter of Raynes Park, of Messrs. Dobbie of Edinburgh, and Mr. W. J. Unwin of Histon to give me their ideas as to the best 24 sweet peas for exhibition, and the best 24 for garden decoration.

For the moment we will leave aside the question of garden decoration; the would-be exhibitor must get to work a little earlier than is necessary for the mere garden decorator and flower-lover. We will return to the needs of the latter in due course.

The four experts agree as to only one of the exhibition varieties—namely, Hercules, a rich pink.

Three of the experts, though not always the same three, agree as to the supreme merits of six of the other varieties, or seven of them, if we reckon Maud Holmes and Sun-proof Crimson as one. The half-dozen varieties as to which three of the experts are in agreement are: King White, an enormous white bloom, introduced by the great American specialist, Atlee Burpee; Elfrida Pearson, pale pink; Mrs. Cuthbertson, clear rose pink with white wings; Rosabelle, rose; King Manoel, maroon—a variety much admired at last year's shows all over the country, and having a singularly long and robust stem; and Clara Curtis, a primrose or cream variety—if Dobbie's Cream is grown this may be dispensed with, and vice versa.

Dobbie's Cream, which is being marketed this year by the way, is described by Mr. G. H. Mackereth, of Ulverston ("the sweet pea clearing house"), in his unique list of raisers' particulars of new varieties, as "an improved Clara Curtis," which it is inadvisable to grow on a single stem if intended for exhibition.

Thirteen varieties for exhibition are nominated by two out of the four experts; but, again, the two experts are not the same in all cases. The varieties receiving two votes are: Etta Dyke, white; Edrom Beauty, orange, salmon wings; R. F. Felton, lavender, or lilac suffused French grey—a variety which is said to be the strongest growing sweet pea in existence, but, requiring special treatment, each single stem being allowed to fork when 3 feet high (seed of R. F. Felton is scarce this year, and some growers, in its absence, recommend the growing of Orchid, a rose-lavender, as a substitute); Margaret Atlee (Duplex), rich cream pink, somewhat resembling Constance Oliver, and thought by many to be the best of the American sweet peas; Barbara, an improved Earl Spencer, salmon orange; Thomas Stevenson, orange scarlet (one of the experts nominates St. George Improved, which is practically synonymous with Thos. Stevenson); Edith Taylor, rosy cerise or salmon rose; Elsie Herbert, white, picotee edged in rose; Florence Lightingle, very large, lavender; Constance Oliver, cream ground, crayoned rosy pink and carmine; Scarlet Emperor, a huge scarlet flower; Evelyn Hemus, deep cream-yellow, terra cotta picotee edge—a product of the work of that gifted raiser, Miss Hilda Hemus, of Upton-on-Fevern; and Mrs. W. J. Unwin, rich orange salmon flaked on white, one of the finest varieties so far introduced by Mr. W. J. Unwin, of

Histon, Cambs., who has given us some of the very best both for garden and show bench.

From these 20 varieties it should be possible for any intending exhibitor to select a dozen varieties that, given good cultivation, would be in the running with the stiffest of competition. As Mr. Eckford, in a covering note, reminds me, it is always well if one opposes to exhibit in a class for 12 varieties to grow at least 14 varieties, especially when some of those grown are unfamiliar to the grower and comparatively new to this country or to commerce.

Not every novelty is reliable under ordinary amateur conditions, or even under the most experienced professional supervision, as may be gathered from the apologetic references to failures of seed from some of the latest American introductions to be found in this year's catalogues. For example, Mr. Unwin mentions that at his grounds last summer R. F. Felton and Edith Taylor—the latter admittedly one of the loveliest of sweet peas—disappointed him.

Readers who require a larger range than that already indicated will be well advised to consider the claims of the following varieties (whose colors they can check in the catalogues of one or other of the firms mentioned above), all of them nominated by one of the aforesaid experts:—

Agricola, America Spencer, Apricot, Bertrand Deal, Blue Jack, Cambridge Blue, Captain of the Blues Waved, Carine, Colleen, Cynthia Waved, Cyril Unwin, Dobbie's Cream, Dorothy Tennant Spencer, Duplex Spencer, Edna Unwin, Flora Norton Spencer, Gladys Burt, Gustav Hamel, Irish Belle, John Ingman, King Edward Spencer, Lady Evelyn Eyre, Lady Miller, Lavender George Herbert, Leslie Imber, Lillian, Mark's Tey, Marjorie Willis, Mavourneen, May Campbell, Melba, Menie Christie, Mrs. A. Ireland, Mrs. J. C. House, Mrs. R. Hallam, Mrs. R. P. Ward Nubian, Othello Spencer, Papilio, Pearl Grey, Prince George, Queen Wilhelmina, Radiant, St. George Improved, Tennant Spencer, W. P. Wright and Zillah Smith.

These varieties include not only the cream of the varieties best suited for exhibition, but those which will do one most credit in his garden; indeed, the large majority of the varieties named are equally valuable for either purpose.

Of course, there are a hundred other varieties only slightly inferior for show or decorative purposes, if at all, to these; and I put forward the foregoing nominations without dogmatism, merely as representing the ripe opinion of four men entitled to have strong views as to the merits of this or that variety, from knowledge of it alike whilst growing and as shown in exhibition classes at the leading shows.

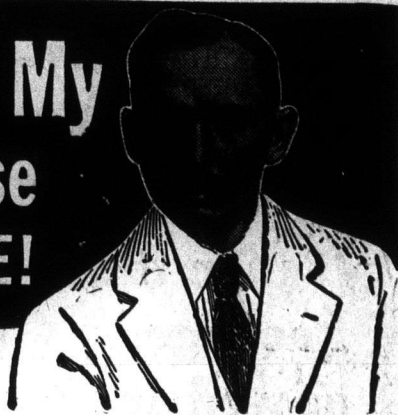
Sick soil which did not receive a dressing of lime in the fall should be treated as early as possible this spring, for it is necessary to leave freshly limed soil resting for a month or so before any planting or sowing is done. Use ground quicklime at the rate of 1 lb. to every three square yards, and dig it in immediately after spreading it.

In order to tell whether one's soil is deficient in lime place a handful in a glass and add sufficient water to cover it, with an inch to spare. At first air bubbles will rise from the soil, and when this action has finished about half an ounce of spirits of salts should be added to the water. If the soil be all right as regards lime there will be a noticeable effervescence; but if, on the contrary, there is no bubbling up of gas, or only a very insignificant trace of effervescence, that is evidence of lack of lime.

In many small gardens too much space is wasted on paths. One generally runs right round the whole plot, and there are sometimes others across it. In

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