

THE FLOWER GARDEN.

New Plants.

Croton Majesticum.

This new Croton has been introduced from the South Sea Islands, and will be a most welcome addition to our collections of variegated-leaved stove plants. In coloring it is truly gorgeous; its narrow leaves are of a deep olive green, edged with scarlet and having a deep scarlet midrib; and are dotted with numerous spots, some of which are yellow and others scarlet. As the leaves acquire age the olive green portion becomes yellow, thus presenting a great variety of coloring.

It thrives best in a strong heat, accompanied with abundant moisture and exposed to a strong light. It should be grown in rich loam mixed with a little peat and sand, thoroughly drained, so that the abundance of water in which it delights shall never become stagnant.

Crotons will bear the atmosphere of a dwelling-house remarkably well, and can be used for decoration in the sitting room, or on the dinner table, where their showy foliage is a constant source of gratification.

The Hanging-Gardens of Babylon.

Our pretty hanging baskets, with their suspension wires completely draped in delicate climbing vines and standing mosses, and their masses of beautiful trailing plants, their drooping grasses, vines, mimosa, musk-scented and covered with brilliant golden flowers, though diminutive are literally hanging-gardens. But even should they be made a million times larger, the plan is so utterly different, that they could never suggest the faintest notion of the hanging gardens of Babylon, about the very name of which there is a ring of poetic grandeur and a flavor of Oriental magnificence. They were literally Paradise; for, though our word is directly from the Greek, the Greeks borrowed it from Persia, where to this day the rich satraps rejoice in their paradises, or pleasure gardens. Xenophon mentions those of Belesis, governor of Syria; and such as he beheld them, apparently, we find them described by Chardin and other modern travellers. The hanging-gardens of Babylon were simply a very costly variety of the paradise, such as only princely wealth could afford. The origin is attributed to Semiramis by some; others say they were invented by a king of Syria to charm the melancholy of one of his wives, of Persian origin, who sighed to behold again the verdant mountains of her native land. Strabo and Diodorus Siculus have written about these famous hanging-gardens, Philo of Byzantium—if, indeed, he is the author of the treatise on the seven wonders of the world by some attributed to him, and many others.

They were called hanging-gardens, doubtless, because of the huge branching palms and other trees, overhanging the balustrade on the summit of the high walls that inclosed the paradise. These walls were about one hundred and thirty yards long on each of the four sides, twenty-two feet thick, and fifty cubits high, or over ninety-one feet according to the Hebrew cubit; by the Roman or by the English cubit, a little less. Around the interior on all sides, rose terrace above terrace to the number of twenty, the top one resting on the outer walls, and even with the balustrade. The terraces were upheld by immensely strong galleries, whose ceilings were formed of hewn stones sixteen feet long and four wide. Resting on these stones was a layer of reeds, mixed with a great quantity of asphalt, and on this was a double floor of fire-dried bricks laid in mortar; finally, a floor of lead plates to prevent any moisture from penetrating the foundations of the terraces, the soil of which rested directly on the leaden floor, and was of sufficient depth to hold and nourish trees fifty feet high, and thousands of rare plants culled from all parts of the known world. All these were kept in a perennially flourishing condition. We are informed, by water raised from the Euphrates through the aid of machinery, concealed from a view in certain rooms made in the galleries. The galleries also contained many royal apartments, variously decorated and furnished. Decently lighted they could not have been; but one can easily imagine that a walk around those upper terraces on a fine moonlight night, the scenes charmed by soft music and by waves of perfume rising from the wilderness of flowers and shrubs below, must have been enchanting to the last degree.—*Marie Howland.*

Plants Growing in Windows.

Thousands who try to grow plants in pots, tubs or boxes, fail, mostly because they let the pots be exposed to the hot sun. Now we never see the roots—that is, the part which draws nutriment from the soil—fully exposed to the sun in a state of nature, and this should teach window gardeners to shade the pots and boxes in which their plants grow. Another cause of failure is allowing the leaves (being in reality the lungs of the plant) to get dirty; it is imperative that they should be kept clean. I have often been asked why plants did not do well in windows, and it is often difficult to answer without seeing the plants, but the general failures occur from the causes above named, for it stands to reason that if both the roots of the plant are burned off repeatedly and the leaves are killed with dust, sickness will be the result. It is easy to clean off the dust by taking a little brush or broom and dipping it in water and flinging over the leaves of the plant two or three times a week. Try it, ladies.—*Prairie Farmer.*

Supports for Flowers.

A correspondent of the *Journal of Horticulture* advised the culture of the *Halea*, or snow-drop tree as a means of supplying suitable sticks as a support for pet plants. He says:

Procure plants or suckers, select a piece of ground; they are not particular as to soil, any out of the way place will do, but a moist one will suit them best; plant them one foot apart and cut them down to within two inches of the ground every autumn. If a few stronger stalks are wanted, leave the plants a winter without cutting, tie the shoots in bundles and keep them in a dry place until wanted for use. If used green, as they emit roots so freely, they should be placed in a hot flue oven, or some such place, for a few hours.

The quantity a few plants will grow is astonishing and the stalks will last two years, and I am sure they are unequalled for tying such plants as *Achimenes*, *Mignonette*, etc. If allowed to grow in the shrubberies, the plants are very ornamental; but when permitted to flower and make large bushes, the quantity of shoots obtained is diminished considerably. Bees, too, are very fond of this plant, the flowers being numerous; and from them, the bees gather a great quantity of honey.

There are other plants, from which useful flower-sticks may be taken; many varieties of hardy, deciduous *Spiræas*; varieties of *Hypericum* or St. John Wort, *Ligustrum* or Privet, and *Lilacs*.

The Value of Sunflowers.

We would call the attention of farmers at this time to the value of sunflowers as a crop, and enumerate some of their values and uses.

In the first place, the flowers abound in honey and furnish food for bees. The seeds contain oleaginous matter, and will yield oil at the rate of one gallon to the bushel, which is but little inferior to olive oil. One acre will produce fifty bushels of seed. It is also valuable for feed for horses and poultry. The leaves are excellent fodder for cattle.

The stalks while growing may be utilized as bean poles, where they are scarce and difficult to be obtained, and when dry may be used as roofing, or set up against a fence to form a wind-break. They contain a large amount of potash and are excellent for fire kindling. The seed has also been recommended for fuel.

The reputation of the growing sunflower to absorb miasmatic vapors, and preventing fever and ague, is well known.

Flowers Among the Ancients.

The custom of using flowers on occasions of mourning and festival is of high antiquity. Roses were especial favorites of the Romans; their floors and couches were strewn with them at feasts; sometimes the ceiling was arranged to shower roses on those below, occasionally almost to suffocation. Among the Greeks

It was the custom then to bring away
The blushing bride from home at close of day,
Borne in a chariot, heralded along
With strewn flowers, torches, and a marriage song.

The classic fables concerning them are innumerable. Daphne transformed to the Laurel; Symplocos to the Red; Narcissus, emblem of self-love; Hyacinth, sprung from the blood of Apollo's murdered favorite; and Anemone from the earth where lay dead Adonis—are but few of those that might be mentioned.

COLEUS VERSCHAFFELTI SPLENDENS.—This is a fine high-colored sport from the good old *C. Verschaaffeltii*. It is several shades paler, and consequently produces a brighter effect than that kind. When this becomes generally known, it will be grown in quantity for bedding purposes in place of *Verschaaffeltii*.

Tobacco Leavers.—The State Chemist of Connecticut, in his report, presents some interesting information in reference to the tobacco crop, with the result of tests upon the tobacco leaves. The general summary of the reports is as follows: The most highly valued tobacco in New England is the thin, tough, elastic leaf, which burns readily to ashes. These leaves containing the most carbonate of potash in their ashes, burn the most freely and suitably. In some combinations potash does not favor the burning, and some tobacco manufacturers improve the flavor and burning quality by artificially impregnating the leaf with acetate, citrate, or tartrate of potash, applying the latter in solution and then drying. Chlorine injures the tobacco, as also does nitric acid. Sulphuric acid, united with potash, soda, or lime, favors the burning of tobacco. The best tobacco is produced on well-drained, warm, sandy lands. It is believed heavy manuring increases the quantity of the crop generally at the expense of quality as regards texture.

THE SELECTION of plants for winter window vases depends essentially upon which side is to be the point of view. If chiefly from the outside, large leaves and large colors show best, such as bulbs, or well grown foliage plants, as begonias, &c., kept under glass shades to preserve the necessary air moisture, with the warmth which they require. But if the vase is seen chiefly from the inside, the case is very different. Colors will not show well against the light, but neatness of outline and graceful wantonness of spray will show with great elegance, especially if seen against the sky with only the panes of glass intervening. The pretty curls of the coleum ivy (*linari cymbalaria*), or the ringlet smilax (*myrsiphyllum*), or the fine tufts of gypsophylla and of some saxifrages, sedums, galiums, and other Alpine plants and grasses are graceful in every turn, like the unstudied movements of a joyous child, and color will not be wanting. Leaves thin enough to show their tints transparently, show them against the sky to great advantage. Most of these plants endure dry air very well.—*Country Gentleman.*

THE MICHIGAN STATE POMOLOGICAL SOCIETY held its third annual meeting in the first week in December. It was stated that the signs (which almost always fail) indicated that the winter would be an open one: a mild winter was considered disadvantageous to fruit-growers, but what the Society propose to do about it is not stated. Prof. Cook stated that in the last disastrous winter orchards that had been cultivated fared worse than others; in the Grand Traverse region, where the snow is generally four feet deep, fruit culture was successful. Fruit near Kalamazoo had suffered from the drought of summer. The often vexed question of the best and hardiest grape came up. Mr. Chilson, of Battle Creek, considered the Delaware the hardiest and most money making; the Diana the best keeper; approved of covering the vines with earth in winter, and that no grapes were hardy enough for Michigan without this protection; the Iona, though it often fails, he considered a standard variety. Mr. Sterling, of Monroe, advocated Concord and Norton's Virginia. In the Strawberry discussion the Wilson was the favorite.

THE ROSE GARDENS OF FRANCE.—The rose gardens of France are celebrated. Acres and acres of roses bloom in them for the perfumer. Heliotrope, mignonette and other floral plants are found side by side with them in dense masses. The air is heavy with almost sickening fragrance, and for miles around the breezes bear the sweet tidings that "they have flown over the gardens of Gaul in their bloom." But who has heard of an English lavender field? Very few, certainly, in this country. Fewer still have seen one. Yet within thirty miles of London these lavender fields have become quite an extensive and recognized industry, and there is annually produced in England alone, sufficient oil from the plant to manufacture thirty thousand gallons of spirits of lavender, besides a large quantity, the total of which is unknown, to be used in the production of other perfumes with more pretentious names. The plant is at the best between three years of age and seven. The harvest time is the first week in August. The flowers are then cut and taken to the distillery, followed by an innumerable army of bees, which insects are especially fond of them. Here the essential oil is pressed out, and is ready to be mixed with the proper ingredients to make lavender water.