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### Garden Chat

**I**N March, if the season is early, and you have a well-drained soil, you can begin work in the garden. On sandy land remember that you can scarcely get sweet peas in too early. They like a cool soil in which to make good root growth without which they will not amount to anything, and the only time a sandy soil is really cool is before the warm weather begins.

Sown early, they get a chance for the roots to strike down so deeply into a cool strata of soil that they are able to withstand the heat, and, provided they are liberally treated and well watered, they will respond generously; though they do best on a well-drained clay loam.

Many sweet pea growers make a point of getting their seeds in on St. Patrick's Day (17th March); this is possible only when the soil is in good workable condition; there can be no hard and fast rule about it, but light soils are generally workable as soon as the frost is out of them, and when that time arrives you can sow sweet peas, no matter how early it is, as they are hardy, and can even be sown with advantage in the autumn on well-drained soil.

#### WHERE TO SOW SWEET PEAS

Sweet peas thrive best out in the open, where the air can circulate freely amongst them, though in small gardens it is not always possible to give them such a position. About the worst place to put them is against a close fence or wall, facing south or west. In such a hot, dry, position both sweet peas and roses are almost certain to become infested with that minute, but very destructive pest, the red spider, unless the under side of the leaves are kept constantly syringed with water. This little miscreant is so small that it is scarcely visible to the naked eye, but if the foliage turns a sickly yellowish gray and there is a general air of unhappiness about your plants, examine the under-side of the leaves with a magnifying glass, and you will probably find him at work: water is the cure, sprayed as vigorously as possible up amongst the foliage. The green aphid is another bad enemy; it sometimes completely covers the ends of the new shoots and sucks away the plant's vitality. A spray of whale oil soap, or coal oil emulsion, or even a strong suds of Ivory soap is said to be efficacious. Lose no time in applying a remedy, for their powers of reproduction are almost miraculous. A somewhat troublesome feature in connection with sweet pea culture is that they do not do so well if grown for two successive years in the same spot, and it is then often a puzzle, if one's lot is small, to change them to a fresh one. However, this can be overcome by digging out the old soil and filling in the trench with fresh, mixed with plenty of well-decayed manure. Sowing in a trench is the almost universally accepted method nowadays. The ground ought to be prepared in the fall, but if this has not been done, dig a trench at least a foot deep (as soon as the earth is dry enough to work properly), and wide enough for a double row (from twelve to eighteen inches), throwing the earth up on each side—then spread at least six inches of old manure in the trench and fork it in thoroughly, mixing it well with the soil in the bottom of the trench, next put back enough of the soil from the sides to fill it within six inches of the top and make it nice and firm. Now sow your seeds, and when that is done, sprinkle enough earth over them to cover them, well, say one inch. When the plants are three or four inches high begin to add the rest of the soil gradually, until finally the trench is filled in completely. Keep the earth well cultivated, so as to act as a mulch in warm weather. If the seed is sown thickly the plants should be thinned out to stand at least six inches apart—an English grower of renown allows eighteen inches between pot-grown

plants, when putting them out in the ground (when he wants to grow exhibition blooms), but that is unnecessarily great surely for ordinary purposes, even in England, while here, where the air is less heavy and we have so much sunshine, there is certainly no need of so much space between plants. There should be twelve inches between the double rows.

Every one has their own little theory as to what is the best support for sweet peas—having tried chicken fencing, wires, strings and a combination of some of them, I have returned to the old-fashioned brush as being the most satisfactory for the trouble involved, though it is perhaps not so neat as some of the others. I watch for some of the street trees being pruned, and send a boy with a wheelbarrow for a load or two of the branches; place these in position before they are needed, then they will be ready for the first tendrils to cling to, and there will be no plants lying prone on the ground begging for help to get on their feet again.

#### HOT BEDS

Hotbeds are often a great source of pleasure, and if the garden is large, they pay very well, as once you have stood the initial expense of a good substantial frame and the sash for it, the annual expense consists chiefly of a man's time in forking over the manure once or twice (to make it heat evenly) and renewing a few panes of glass, a certain percentage of which will get broken in spite of all the care you can take of it. The manure should scarcely be charged against the hotbed account, because you are obliged to have it as a fertilizer in any case, and the hotbed only helps to get it into a most desirable condition of decay, ready to use in connection with fall planting. It is a very easy matter to ascertain whether a hotbed would be a paying investment or not, if you can remember about the number of boxes of annuals (such as asters, stocks, marigolds, phlox Drummondii, verbenas, etc.,) you are in the habit of buying each season; if you only need one box of each there is no use growing them, as you would have to pay as much or more for the seeds, to say nothing of the trouble of growing them, but if you want large quantities of each variety and you have the time to grow and attend to them yourself, then it pays very well, and you have endless pleasure and plenty of work (pricking out your seedlings, etc.), to keep you out of mischief all spring. In addition to flowers you can grow tomato, cabbage, cauliflower and other vegetable plants, and can have successive sowings of cress (pepper grass), radishes and lettuce, long before they would be ready in the open ground. In the country a hotbed is almost indispensable, to provide green vegetables at the time of year when the system craves for them most, and where it is generally impossible to buy them. A small impromptu hotbed can often be made at little or no expense if you happen to have an old window sash, and a few boards to make a frame to fit it—the front board should be about eight or ten inches wide, the back one nearly as wide again as the front, and the sides cut on the slant (the width at the back of the back board, and the width at the front of the front board), and securely nailed to both back and front. Place this frame on an evenly-spread bed of hot manure; the bed should be enough larger than the frame, to allow of a six-inch (or more) margin of manure all round the frame, and should be thoroughly tramped down. Put a four-inch layer of good mellow earth inside the frame, and put on the sash; when the earth is nice and warm sow your seeds in it. When the seed is sown and the glass down there will be so little evaporation, if it fits properly, that the earth will remain nice and moist for some time without watering. A hotbed must be watched carefully to see that the temperature does not get too high, or your seeds may have the life literally cooked out of them—a



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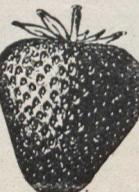
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