

Household Elegancies.

WINTER BOUQUETS, GRASSES, ETC.

As usual, at this season, we have inquiries as to the preparation of grasses, flowers, etc., to use for winter decorations. It is not practical for us to go over all the details, but for the benefit of our readers, we give the principal points. In Europe, the preservation of flowers is a regular business carried on in large establishments and employing many hands. Great numbers of these flowers are imported by our dealers, both made up in wreaths, bouquets, baskets, etc., and in bunches or clusters all of one kind. Most of the made-up affairs are not of a kind that appeal to our taste, the object being, apparently, to crowd the greatest possible variety of the most positive colors—even to black (!) in each design. The effect, as a general thing, is artificial and tawdry.

AS TO GRASSES.

These are largely imported, and of late years some dealers have offered many of these collected in various parts of the country. These for the most part are dyed of various brilliant colors, and look, to our taste, so thoroughly unnatural, that we are repelled rather than attracted by them. The pleasing effect of grasses is in form, rather than in color, and when we see specimens which are naturally of a soft green or straw color, dyed with the most intense crimson or blue, or of a green, the like of which no grass ever presented, the eye is arrested by the "stunning" color, and takes no note of the beauty of form. Others load their grasses with crystals of alum; and worse yet, others are given a metallic appearance by the application of bronze powders. We can describe how these things are done, but we can not find beauty in them.

THE TIME FOR COLLECTING GRASSES.

Each month there will be some grasses in season, and though many of the earlier ones have gone by, there will be found, during this month and next, a sufficient variety, especially of the larger kinds. As some of the most pleasing kinds are of no agricultural value, they are not generally known by common names, and to give their botanical names would be of no use except to botanists, who do not need them. We therefore simply say, that by road sides, in meadows, and especially in moist and swampy land, grasses are to be sought for. Not only the more showy kinds, but those which have delicate, fine panicles of flower clusters should be collected. Secure long stems, and cut away the leaves. In most grasses the upper joint that bears the flower cluster will pull out readily from the sheathing leaf; this will often leave the stem too short to make up conveniently, and it is better to take several joints of the stem and cut away the leaves. If one can choose the time for collecting, the grasses should be watched as they develop, and taken when in flower, which may be known by the protrusion of the *anthers* or the feathery *stigmas*. Some grasses if gathered much later than this, will drop portions of their flowers, or shed their seeds in an unpleasant manner. Still, if one is but temporarily at a locality, a desirable grass should be taken in the condition it is found at the time.

DRYING THE GRASSES.

Those in which the panicle is graceful and drooping, should be dried so as to preserve the natural form. If such are tied in bunches and hung up carelessly, they will be disappointing when dry. A handy method is to have a broad and not very deep box of sand, and stick the stems in this. Those kinds in which the flowers are in a close and spike-like cluster, may be tied in convenient bunches and hung up, heads down; a little practice will teach the proper treatment if it be remembered that the form in which the grass is dried can not be afterwards changed. Any airy place will answer for drying, such as an unoccupied room, or an old-fashioned garret. When the stems are quite dry, the flower cluster will be so; and if the drying place is not quite free from dust, they should be put away from dust and from flies, which are very fond of collecting upon them.

BESIDES THE TRUE GRASSES

there are various members of the Sedge Family that are worth collecting, especially the Cotton-grasses (*Eriophorum*), which show their white and brownish plumes in the boggy meadows. Indeed, whatever plants by grace or beauty of form commend themselves to the collector, should be gathered, without reference to botanical relationships.

PRESERVING SHOWY FLOWERS.

While grasses are as much flowers as roses and camellias, they

are not popularly so regarded, and in the trade, "preserved flowers and grasses" are offered. We compromise the matter by calling the others "showy" flowers, of which a large number are prepared abroad. The class of annuals known as "Everlastings," are cultivated by many with a view to the use of their flowers in winter decorations. The majority of these require only to be picked as they just come into bloom, carefully dried and kept from the light and dust until wanted. A large number of the imported flowers are preserved by means of sulphur fumes, the process being precisely that used in bleaching straw hats. A box or barrel is provided, which if not tight, may be made so by pasting paper over the joints; this should have a small opening near the bottom to admit air, which can be closed when needed; a few inch and a half holes to be stopped with plugs will answer. An arrangement should be made to support cross-wise sticks at the top; a tight fitting cover and an old iron pan, or flower-pot with the hole plugged, to hold live coals, complete the outfit. The flowers are tied in small clusters in such a manner that the fumes can reach all parts, and hung upon the cross-sticks, live coals being put in the pot or pan, a few lumps of sulphur are thrown upon them and the cover placed on; if the cover does not fit closely, put folds of wetted cloth under it and a heavy weight on top. When the box or barrel is well filled with fumes, close the lower air hole and leave all untouched for 24 hours. At the end of this time, remove the flowers and hang them in an airy room to dry. When quite dry they may be laid away in boxes. All flowers do not succeed equally well, and there is room for experience. Among those we found most satisfactory were, China Asters, Fuchsia buds, Larkspurs—the dark colored kinds, Red flowered Spiræas, Golden-rods, Roses—the rod well filled and not over-blown ones answering best. As a general thing, the flowers are better if taken just as they are opening; some, such as the Fuchsias, even in the bud, to be opened afterwards. Some flowers after sulphuring will be quite bleached; but the color in most can be restored, as we may show in speaking of making them up.

Health and Home.

LABOR AS A FORM OF ATHLETIC EXERCISE.

Open-air labor is the most effective cosmetic, an almost infallible panacea against all kinds of bodily deformity. But the remedial virtue of labor, *i. e.*, sound bodily exercise, is greater than that of open-air life *per se*; for among the rustic population of Scandinavia, Scotland, and Northern Germany, who perform a large portion of their hard work in-doors, we frequently find models of health and vigor; far more frequently than among the inhabitants of Italy, Spain, etc., who pass the greater part of their indolent lives in the open air.

But besides all this, athletic exercises have a moral value; which our social reformers have strangely failed to recognize; they afford a diversion and a vent to those animal energies which otherwise are sure to explode in debauch and all kinds of vicious excesses. The sympathetic thrill by which the mind accompanies a daring gymnastic feat, and the enthusiasm of athletic contests, form the most salutary, and perhaps the only normal gratification of that love of excitement which is either the legitimate manifestation of a healthy instinct, or else a wholly irremediable disease of our nature. The soul needs emotions as the body needs exercise, and the exciting sports of the palestra met both wants at once. We try to suppress these instincts, but their motives remain, and if thwarted in their normal manifestations they assert themselves in some abnormal way, chemically instead of mechanically, as Dr. Boerhaave would say, by convulsing the organs of digestion, since the organs of motion are kept in unbearable inactivity. In times of scarcity the paupers of China and Siam silence the clamors of their hungry children by dosing them with opium; and for analogous reasons millions of our fellow-citizens seek relief in alcohol; they want to benumb a feeling which they cannot satisfy in a healthier way.

After finishing his day's work the Grecian mechanic went to the gymnasium, the Roman to the amphitheatre, and the modern European and American goes to the next "saloon," to satisfy by different methods the same instinct—a longing for a diversion from the dull sameness of business routine. There is no question which method was the best—the only question is which of the two bad substitutes may be the worse: the brutalizing, *i. e.*, soul-hardening spectacles of bloodshed of the Roman arena, or the soul-destroying poisons of the liquor shops!—Dr. F. L. Oswald, in *Popular Science Monthly*.