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RURAL AND SUBURBAN

CAMELLIA RETICULATA

This is the largest flowered and handsomest of the camellias, so far as we know them in gardens, and although it was introduced from China in 1827, it is still rare in cultivation. For many varieties favor went to the double-flowered varieties of C. japonica, but they are now distinctly out of fashion. Yet they are beautiful, and as easy to manage as any shrub we know. There is, however, some evidence of a revival of a taste for camellias in the demand for the single-flowered varieties of C. japonica and for the big peony-flowered C. reticulata, which we are told by the few nurserymen who deal in camellias is finding favor as an outdoor shrub in the warmer parts of our islands. That it is hardy in Cornwall and Devon we know for certain, and in a garden near Cork there was or used to be an exceptionally large specimen, 60ft. round, which flowered profusely every year. The largest ever recorded in England was grown in a conservatory at Bank Grove, near Kingston, Surrey. This plant, on the testimony of Sir W. J. Hooker, was in 1849 13ft. high and soft, round, and every year it flowered with exceptional freedom, so much so that in October, 1848, it was considered necessary for the continued health of the plant to remove 2,600 flower buds, leaving about 2,000 on the tree, which expanded in April, when there were at least as many flowers as leaves. There is a large pyramidal specimen nearly 20ft. high in the great conservatory at Kew, which every spring is a great attraction when in flower, and it may be that this plant, which is seen and admired by thousands, has led to the increased demand for this and other camellias. Certainly no large conservatory should be without one or more specimens of this camellia, and, as we have already observed, it is worth a place in every good garden where the tenderer plants from China, Japan, etc., are hardy.

The difference between C. reticulata and C. japonica is chiefly one of habit and leaf character, the former being a comparatively loose grower with long branches, whilst its leaves are rigid, flat, much longer than broad, dull, not shining, and with strongly marked reticulating veins. There is also a difference in the flowers; those of C. japonica being smooth, whilst in C. reticulata they are clothed in a silky down. Compared with the flowers of the old-fashioned camellias, those of C. reticulata are larger and much looser, but there are now forms of C. japonica which have the same informal branching of petals, although some are so large-flowered. A full-sized bloom of C. reticulata is 8in. across, and the petals are colored a rich rose red. We have seen drawings of C. reticulata in which the flowers are white, and, according to Wilson and Henry, the white flowered variety is not uncommon in the woods of Yunnan. It is also recorded that the white one used to grow in woods in Hongkong, forming trees 30ft. high. So far as we know, this white flowered variety has never been introduced into Europe. There are in cultivation hybrids between C. japonica and C. reticulata and it is more than likely that the big flowered loose-petaled varieties recently raised in Belgium and now attracting some attention have some reticulata blood in them.

Camellia is a fairly large genus of considerable variety as regards habit, size, and form of leaves and flowers. Between C. reticulata, the giant of the genus, and the smaller willow-leaved then-stemmed C. gracilis and C. salicifolia, there are numerous well marked species, some of which have attractions and are worth introducing into cultivation. We have at present, in addition to those mentioned, two others, viz., C. roseoiflora and C. sasangua, and, of course, we have the tea plant, C. thea, which belongs to another group. They would probably all intercross, and it would be quite worth the while of some enterprising gardener to take camellias in hand with a view to breeding a race of handsome evergreen, large-flowered shrubs of reasonable hardiness. In this way the garden rhododendrons were made.

COLUMBINES

The columbines or aquilegias have at last reached the rank of first-class garden plants. Perhaps a better way of expressing this would be to speak only of the big-flowered, long-spurred garden columbines which have been evolved out of all sorts of crossings and selections, and are now being claimed by all the nurserymen as Smith's or Jones' or Brown's special strain of long-spurred aquilegias. The credit of breeding does not belong to anyone in particular. We may say that after much effort and many disappointments the columbines have at last been collared, and we can now be certain of getting them in perfection by securing a packet of seeds of the right strain, sowing them in the nursery in early summer, transplanting the young plants in late autumn to the bed or border where they are to flower in the following May or June, according to the character of the weather in spring. As every gardener knows, this was not possible a few years ago. Columbines then were veritable mongrels, poor in form and size, dull in color, always disappointing because one's knowledge of their forbears encouraged hope that this latest batch, at any rate, would be good. Without attempting to account for them we could name other garden races of plants which, after a period of shiftiness, unstable behavior, due very likely to the crossing and blending they had undergone at the hands of the breeder, came almost with a spurt to the top of their form and stayed there. Gladioli, begonia, streptocarpus, pansy, viola, carnation, odetta,

delphinium, and petunia may be cited as examples. They had passed through the crucible, and after the removal of much scum we got as the residuum all that was good, or at any rate all that was needed, of the different species or varieties that were worked into the blend to give the desired result. In the case of aquilegias every cultivator knows how difficult it is to keep them pure. If there were two species anywhere near each other they were almost certain to get crossed with each other. How many of them have played a part in the development of the best strain of aquilegia of today it would be difficult to decide. Color has come from a considerable number, although if one begins to breed from a blue-flowered plant he can as a rule get all the other colors in time. Still, with aquilegias the color blends are pretty evident. In all other characters, habit, stature, foliage, size and form of flower the dominant parent has unquestionably been the Rocky Mountain columbine, A. coerules, which, when it was discovered and introduced by the collector Burke about fifty years ago, was described as "a most beautiful columbine, the flowers very large, beautifully white, variously tinged above with light blue." It is not only the queen of columbines, but the most beautiful of all herbaceous plants. The flowers of this plant are nearly 3in. across, and their straight, slender, green-tipped spurs are long. These are the characters of the best "long-spurred" strains of today, except the colors, which are now of almost every shade except crimson. A bed of these columbines has been the joy of my garden for the last fortnight, so elegant and so pleasing in their kaleidoscopic shades of color that I am inclined just now to agree with Burke that the columbine is the finest of all herbaceous plants. A vase filled with a selection of the flowers has been a lovely object in a room for over a week. There are unfortunately poor mongrel strains of columbines still about. A neighbor has a bed of them, which he declares was raised from seeds purchased as the best long-spurred strain. They are poor things, after the style of A. vulgaris, our native species, but spoiled by crossing. To be certain of having next May or June the genuine and lovely long-spurred strain one must purchase seeds now from a trustworthy dealer, sow them at once on a moist partly shaded border, and keep the young plants going until September, when they should be transplanted in wet weather to the place where they are wanted to flower next year.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DAHLIA

No one who has admired the glowing colors of the dahlia can fail to be interested in the story of the change from a most uninteresting daisy-like flower to the splendid blossom which it now is, like its near relative, the chrysanthemum, and many other "florists' sowers." In 1784 Vincent Cervantes, director of the Botanical Gardens of the City of Mexico, sent to Cavanilles, the director of the Madrid Botanical Garden, a plant unknown to botanists. It was a tall, spindly affair, with nodding little flowers, each of which had a yellow central disc surrounded by five or six red or orange petals. Cavanilles called it dahlia, in honor of the recently deceased Swedish botanist, Dahl.

But when the plant went to Germany, where the name dahlia had already been given to another plant, the botanist Willdenow conferred upon the newcomer the name Georgina, by which name it has been universally known in Germany until within recent years. This name was given, not in honor of George III. of England, as has been commonly assumed, but of a Russian explorer named Georgi. Dahlias were great rarities in Europe until Humboldt and Bonpland brought back a quantity of seed from Mexico.

The facility with which the color of the flowers could be varied attracted the attention of florists and gardeners. This interest was increased in 1808, when the first double dahlia was produced.

Then arose a keen rivalry in the production of new varieties of form and color among the English and German florists. Prizes amounting to hundreds of dollars were offered for the finest new sorts.

LATE-FLOWERING LILIES IN THE GREENHOUSE

With the practice that now prevails of retarding the bulbs of many Lilies, it is quite possible to obtain flowers of such kinds as L. auratum, L. longiflorum, L. speciosum and L. tigrinum Fortunei nearly throughout the year. In order to retard the bulbs expensive appliances are necessary; therefore the better plan is to obtain them in a dormant state from the dealers—that is, just as they have been taken from the refrigerating chamber—or they may be bought later on fully established in pots just as the buds are developing. While this last-named plan gives less trouble to the purchaser, it is the most expensive, both as to the price paid and the cost of carriage. Of the Lilies above enumerated L. auratum is, as might be expected from its erratic behavior out of doors, the least to be depended upon when retarded; but it is such a striking species when at its best that it cannot on any account be passed over. So universal has the retarding process become that at many of the large sales of Japanese bulbs held in London during the autumn and winter months the greater portion are bought in a wholesale manner for retarding in this way. Besides these Lilies that, at least in the case

of some, owe their late-flowering qualities to the treatment they receive, though L. speciosum and L. tigrinum Fortunei will often bloom till the frost, there are at least three others that are naturally late-flowering, namely, L. nepalense, L. neigherrense and L. splendendum. The oldest and now the rarest of the three is L. neigherrense, whose long, primrose-tinted trumpets I have often had in good condition in the greenhouse during the months of October and November. Twenty-five years ago bulbs of this Lily used to be sent here in considerable numbers. It, however, never proved amenable to cultivation after the first season or two, and as the native supply would seem to have become gradually exhausted, it appears to have almost died out. This is a pity, as it is a delightful Lily, possessing among its other features an aromatic fragrance essentially its own.

Lilium nepalense, the next to mention, has, unlike the preceding, been imported in increased numbers within the last few years. It is such a distinct Lily that there is not the remotest danger of confounding it with any other species. The flower stem, which attains to a height of 3 feet to 6 feet, is dark in color and of a particularly firm texture towards the base. In contour the flowers somewhat suggest those of L. szovitzianum, though with a more pronounced tube. In color they are yellow or greenish yellow, with a chocolate purple centre. The shade of yellow varies considerably, as also does the space that the purplish portion occupies on the segments. Except in favored parts it must be regarded essentially as a greenhouse Lily; but it forms such a beautiful autumn feature in that structure, and can when dormant be purchased at such a comparatively cheap rate, that it merits extended cultivation.

Lilium sulphureum is a native of much the same district in Burmah, and though the plants are as distinct as they well can be, the bulbs, singularly enough, greatly resemble each other. Of the two L. sulphureum is the more robust, and has proved to be a very satisfactory plant out of doors in some districts. Where conveniences exist for planting it out in the greenhouse it does well. When treated in this way it will attain a height of 6 feet to 10 feet; but if grown in pots and kept out of doors till the flowers are developing, its stature will be less. When first introduced this Lily was known as L. wallichianum superbum. The flowers of L. sulphureum are very large, trumpet-shaped and highly fragrant. They are of a creamy tint, tinged with red on the exterior, and inside are heavily suffused with yellow.

WATERING PLANTS IN HOUSES AND FRAMES

The well-being of a plant depends, to a great extent, upon the way the watering is done. Fine specimens are soon ruined through injudicious watering. I lately saw some plants that had been partially spoiled through careless watering. The plants in question were growing in pots in the open air, quite exposed to the rains, and showers were frequent; but notwithstanding all this, water was poured into the pots daily. Result: the roots were crippled and starved, the soil soured, and all owing to the atmosphere being moist, evaporation from the leaves being slow, and, consequently, the water artificially applied could not be absorbed. The effect was to stop free growth and to turn the leaves yellow. Plants growing in pots in the open air should not be watered in the evening in autumn; the morning is the best time, then there is not as much danger of over-watering, because the winds and sunshine in the daytime dry up excessive moisture and the roots remain warmer at night.

In the autumn, winter and early part of spring water should be given to pot plants under glass during the morning, from nine to ten o'clock being a very suitable hour. Then there is the question as to the right quantity of water to give to each plant. This can only be settled by the condition the plant is in. If it is a Fuchsia, tuberous Begonia or similar kind of plant that will shortly lose its leaves naturally, watering much take place less frequently; but when it is needed, sufficient must be applied to thoroughly soak the soil in the pot down to the drainage. Zonal Pelargoniums, Cyclamen and similar plants which live and grow throughout the winter, and especially those of a fine fibrous-rooted nature, such as Primulas and Calceolarias, must be most carefully watered, never until the soil is getting rather dry, but always applying sufficient to go right through the pot.—Avon.

POT CURE OF THE FREESIA, MUSCARI AND FRITILLARIA

The three subjects mentioned above can be grown in pots or boxes quite easily, and for this reason they may appeal to the beginner who in the past may have been content to grow only Hyacinths and Tulips wherewith to make his greenhouse or conservatory gay in the early months of the year. Freesia refracta and F. refracta alba, the former having white and orange flowers, and the latter, as the name suggests, white flowers, are among the most easily grown of spring-flowering bulbs.

Too frequently the potting up of the bulbs is done too late in the season, and this invariably detracts from their flowering satisfactory. There is no better period than August and September, and those who have grown this subject in previous years, and who have al-

lowed their bulbs to ripen in the pots in which they flowered last spring, may now shake them out of their pots and repot the bulbs in fresh soil and in other pots or boxes. Other readers who have no such supplies to draw upon should make the necessary purchase from the bulb dealers forthwith. The bulbs can be purchased quite cheaply. For conservatory decoration pots either 5 inches or 6 inches in diameter should be utilized, and they should always be washed quite clean before use. Carefully crock the pots with potsherds, arranging the latter so that they form an excellent drainage of the soil to be placed in the pots subsequently. A suitable compost for this subject is made up of three parts good loam, one part leaf-mould, one part dried cow-manure and one part coarse silty or clean road grit. Should it be difficult to procure the much-valued cow manure, use any well-decayed manure that is available. Mix the foregoing thoroughly, and pass the ingredients through a coarse sieve before mixing them. Eight or ten bulbs in a pot 6 inches in diameter will make a beautiful display, and five in a 5in. pot will answer equally well. A large number of smaller bulbs would, of course, be necessary. Arrange the bulbs about 2 inches apart and at least an inch deep. Cover these with the prepared compost, and if this be fairly moist when used, no water will be required until it becomes dry.

Readers who desire to grow the Freesias for cutting—and they are much appreciated in late winter and early spring—should use boxes or pans. Culture in these boxes is a very simple affair. Plant and cover with soil as advised for those in pots, and place both pots and boxes in a cold frame, where they should remain as long as the weather permits or until growth commences. Very little water will be required until growth is in evidence, and from this point until they have ceased to flower they should be watered freely, subsequent to which gradually withhold water. Introduce successive batches of Freesias into the greenhouse where the temperature can be maintained at from 45 to 5 degrees.

The Muscari or Grape Hyacinths are more often grown outdoors in masses, and in this way they are beautiful and most effective. Although quite hardy, they are well adapted for pot culture. They may be grown successfully in 5in. or 6in. pots or in boxes in similar fashion to the Freesias, but they are never more effective than when grown in pans of good dimensions. Soil for this subject should comprise two parts sandy loam, one part leaf-mould or well-decayed cow manure, and sufficient coarse silver sand to make the compost porous. Mix well before using.

There are a number of pretty species, of which M. botryoides, blue; M. b. album, white; M. conicum (Heavenly Blue), blue; M. comosum (Tassel Hyacinth), deep blue; and M. plumosum (Feather Hyacinth), blue, of curious form, are well known. The bulbs of the latter are larger than some of the other species. After potting place the pans, etc., under a layer of sifted cinders, cocoanut fibre refuse or clean sand till growth commences; then arrange in a cold frame, subsequently removing to a cool greenhouse or window during the flowering period. Dry off after flowering in a sunny spot outdoors.

The Snake-head Fritillaria (Fritillaria Melagris), is one of the commonest of the Fritillarias, and is a native plant of Great Britain. I have grown this Fritillaria in pots and pans and flowered it in a cold greenhouse, giving the plants similar treatment to that accorded the Muscari. There are many other species of the Fritillaria, each of which has a beauty peculiarly its own, and some, such as the Crown Imperials, are very stately and effective when grouped in masses in the hardy border.

GARDENING FOR BEGINNERS

Vegetable Garden

No one can grow fine vegetables in a poor, shallow soil, but the latter, if well trenched and enriched with manure, may be vastly improved in a single year and made to yield very good crops. I feel quite sure that many beginners have had to deal with poor soils during the present year and have experienced some disappointment. Owing to failure success may come, and will come if the ground is trenched. Those who have failed may wonder what they can do to reap better results next year. I do not hesitate to say, trench, trench, trench. Go down quite 30 inches, loosening the lowest 12 inches of soil, thoroughly breaking it up, but leaving it below. Directly any crops such as Peas, Beans, Onions, Carrots and Beet are cleared from the ground, the latter should be trenched if there is no other special use for it. Indeed, it would be much the wisest plan to do the trenching and not attempt to cultivate any other crops on it first. It is well to trench soil of good quality also. Thin out winter Spinach early and also late-sown Turnips.

Fruit Garden

Too often fruit trees are planted in unprepared ground. I know of one very special case where this was done, and the trees are poor ones now, after the lapse of many years. The soil was good, but not trenched. In another instance where the soil was trenched the fruit trees have, in only a few years, done remarkably well. The soil was very poor, too. Owners of small gardens do not grow as many cordon fruit trees as they ought to. Note should be made of spare wall spaces and but-

trusses, so that cordons of Pears, Plums and a few choice Apples may be planted in due course. Bury burnt soil and rubbish in the ground when engaged in trenching the latter for fruit trees.

Greenhouse and Frames

Specimen plants in pots growing on lawns and in flower beds must now be brought in and placed in the greenhouse. Now, if the specimens in question are well taken care of, they will look really well in greenhouses during the winter months. They are worth taking care of, as many years must pass before large plants can be grown. At first on all fine days admit air to them freely. When putting Azaleas in greenhouses be quite sure that the leaves are clean—free as being webbed with thrips. Rather less water will now be required by greenhouse plants generally. The demand upon frame space at this season is very great, so avoid undue crowding of plants and ventilate freely. Place Calanthums (S. Capsicastrum) in the frames now; then the berries will be very highly colored. Remove Libanias from the frames to the greenhouse.—A. A.

JAPANESE CHERRY TREES

Attention has recently been directed to the merits of the various cherries, Japanese and other, as early flowering trees for the garden. They only require to be known to find general favor. They are hardy enough to grow out of doors in all save the coldest parts of our islands, and they are good natured, shapely trees, as well as being wonderfully floriferous in May. We might use them as freely as they are used in Japan, where they are planted in groups in parks, in temple groves, and to form avenues and shade trees in the roads and streets. When they flower in spring the people of Japan have cherry tree festivals after the style of our Chestnut Sunday at Hampton Court. The glory of the cherry trees of Japan has been described by many travelers in that country, and now that we have proved them to be quite suitable trees for our climate they should find as much favor with us as the laburnum, crimson thorn and almond. All the big free-flowered cherries of Japan are forms of Prunus pseudo-cerasus. This grows to a large size, and its wood is of considerable commercial value. The type has single flowers, and there are white, pink, and mauve-colored forms of it; the fruits are small and of no account. The most decorative varieties are those with double flowers, which in some are quite 2in. in diameter and perfectly double. The Japanese nurserymen catalogue them under Japanese names, such as Ojochin, Naden, Shirofugen, etc., and they offer them 4ft. to 5ft. high at about 2s. apiece. One of the best of them is the variety James H. Veitch, which was introduced a few years ago by Messrs. Veitch & Sons, Chelsea. It has large double rosy lilac flowers, and is wonderfully free. Another good one is known as Watereri, and was introduced by Mr. Anthony Waterer, Knapp Hill Nurseries, Woking.

These cherries are most serviceable when grown in pots or tubs and forced in a little warmth for the decoration of conservatories. They stand forcing well, and their flowers last a reasonable time. In this connection we must not forget our own double cherry, a variety of the green, and known botanically as Prunus avium flore pleno or Cerasus domestica flore pleno. This is one of the handsomest of all spring flowering trees, the flowers being large, double, snow white, and borne in crowded clusters all along the branches. A grove of the double flowered cherries would be a noble feature in any park or large garden.

THINNING FRUIT

The wisdom of few of the operations of fruit growing is easier of ocular demonstration than that of thinning the fruits of most trees in season when they have set an abundant crop. Neglect of thinning often means the production of heavy crops of small fruit so inferior in quality as to be well-nigh unsaleable, whereas after thinning there will be an equal weight of fruit (if so desired), with the all important difference that it will command the top price in the market. But in view of the habit of trees to bear too great a weight of fruit one year and next to no crop the next, it is often advisable to thin with a view to reducing the total weight. Regularity in cropping is the great thing to aim at; for in addition to the monetary loss occasioned by a lean fruit year, there may be an over-production of wood which will be a deterrent to future fruitfulness, and a good crop of fruit buds cannot be developed while the trees are struggling to ripen too heavy a crop. Thinning is particularly important in the case of stone fruits. This is because the production of three unsized peaches in place of one handsome specimen means the production of three peach stones, and a corresponding unnecessary amount of skin, and their making exhausts the tree much more. The more common plums hardly repay the labor of thinning, but we may cite the practice of growers who give the trees a first picking over when the fruits are still quite hard and green (in which state they are excellent for preserving) as being worthy of imitation. There is some art in picking gooseberries also; generally speaking, the bushes should not be stripped when the berries are small and green, but some should be left to develop into extra fine specimens for eating when ripe.