

A Few Good Plants for the Dining-Room Table

THE first requirements of plants which are to be used for ornamenting the dining-table is that they be small—not over six or eight inches in height—except in rare instances, when plants 10 to 12 inches may be used. When the centerpiece is too high, it becomes an uncomfortable obstacle to observation and conversation.

Ferns are best for table decoration because they are small, long-lived in the case of several varieties, and cheap, as a rule; at most greenhouses one can buy them grown in two or three-inch pots for 10 cents apiece.

The best, or at least the hardiest, of the small ferns, are the pteris. There are several of them, and the oddly shaped, and, in some cases, peculiarly marked, fronds make them very attractive.

The so-called umbrella palm also makes an excellent centerpiece until it grows too tall, but a small plant will not, as a rule, grow so fast but that it can be used all winter.

Slow Growers.

Pandanus Vietchii, Asparagus plumosus, var. nanus, the silk oak (Grevillea robusta), Cocos Weddelliana, and Phoenix Roebellini, are excellent plants for use as the main plant. Although they will all eventually grow large, their growth is slow, so that, with few exceptions, the trying conditions found in the ordinary house will cause the death of the plants long before they become too large for use. Around these larger plants there should be smaller ones, to cover the soil, and for this purpose the small ferns already mentioned are excellent. The small fern allies, too, like selaginella and lycopodium, may be employed in the same way.

Whatever the plants, however, they must have good care if they are to prove satisfactory for more than a few days. Only recently I overheard a woman complaining to her florist that the plants in her fern dish, which she was using as a centerpiece, were not good plants.

A few questions only were needed to elucidate the fact that, as the woman had bought the plants to decorate the dining-room table with, she had kept them on the table constantly, which, of course, was a great mistake. Ferns, palms and other plants must have light; therefore, when the table is cleared, the best plan is to put the plants in a North or other window, where they will receive an abundance of light, but not the direct rays of the sun, except, possibly in the early morning and late afternoon. Watering must also be carefully attended to.

The dishes used for table centerpieces are so small that, under ordinary circumstances, the soil dries out rapidly. If a special dish, large enough to allow the packing of damp moss around the pot containing the ferns is used, a more uniform condition of moisture can be maintained, but the dish will be so large as to look clumsy. A better way would be to have a moss-filled dish or box in a north window in which the dish may be set during the time it is not on the table.

Hardening Plants.

One reason why centerpieces and other plants bought in greenhouses often fail to give satisfaction is that the plants have not been hardened off to meet the conditions found in the ordinary house. To circumvent this, get the fern-dish filled with such plants as you like that will succeed in the house under ordinary conditions, and then ask the florist to keep it for you a week or two until the soft growth, if there is any, has been hardened off, so that the plants will not wilt or the leaves turn brown shortly after they are taken home.

Ornamental centerpieces for table ferns are to be found in great variety both as respects material and size. Brass fern-dishes are particularly attractive and may be secured for as small a sum as one dollar. China dishes, attractively ornamented, are used, to a large extent, and cost from 25 cents up. Sometimes it is possible to find dainty, small jardinières imported from Japan, which make very attractive centerpieces when containing single small ferns. These jardinières come both in a deep green and a dark red, and have characteristic Japanese decorations. Silver fern-dishes are frequently used, and, while somewhat expensive, are always ornamental and in good taste.—By H. H. Henry.

Trimming Grape Vines.

The old rule which has become well established is to trim grape vines in early Spring.

That is a good time to trim if the

weather or something else does not interfere until the vines are full of sap, and bleed profusely when the trimming is done.

After the fruit and foliage is off the vines, the sap returns to the roots, and then is the best time in the whole year to prune the vines. Late in November, or during the month of December is an ideal time to prune thoroughly and properly.

Scarcely anyone is willing to trim a grape vine as much as it actually needs. It looks too much like ruining the vines to remove the surplus growth that should come away.

Thin the vines out well. Remove every dead or diseased portion, and much of the growth made during the past season. Thin out so the light can find its way through next season when the new growth appears, and the foliage is heavy.

Place the vines over and about the trellis or arbor as you wish them, and tie up carefully so the winter winds cannot beat the vines about and injure the wood.

Pieces of old shoe leather wrapped about the vine and tacked to the arbor make good retainers, but care should be taken not to have these too tight.—J. T. T.

Old-Fashioned Peony Is Again a Favorite

THE peony is becoming one of the popular flowers again. The oldtime garden was not complete without a generous supply of large double peonies in red, white and pink. Today there are hundreds of varieties, varying greatly in form and embracing almost every shade from pure white to the darkest violet red. Odd and beautiful as many of these new sorts are they do not greatly excel the old favorites, and I

would advise a liberal use of the old standard doubles, for they are not so expensive as the new sorts and probably somewhat hardier, forming strong clumps in a shorter time.

Peonies like a deep rich loam, high enough so water will not stand around their roots, and the surface soil should contain sufficient decaying vegetable matter to prevent its becoming compact or forming a crust.

Stir a liberal supply of thoroughly rotted manure or some bone meal into the soil just before growth begins in the Spring, and later give a light mulch unless you intend to give thorough cultivation throughout the season until they have matured the eyes for the coming year.

The hardness of peonies and their compact habit of growth make them especially valuable to plant with shrubbery. A background of evergreens sets off their magnificent blooms to advantage. Planted along the edge of a clump of spirea Van Houttei, or Bridal Wreath as it is usually called, they form pretty masses, but they should be fitted into nooks in the outline of the shrubbery rather than a solid row in front

of it, for the Bridal Wreath has graceful drooping branches which would not show to good advantage over a row of stiff peony plants.

The best time to set peonies is after they become dormant in the Fall and before they begin to form the tender shoots from the base preparatory to starting the Spring growth. As this is done very early it is well to get the work done during some warm spell in Winter. Do not disturb the clumps when once planted for several years, for they do not take kindly to having their roots disturbed, often refusing to bloom for a year or so.

Orchard and Garden Notes.

It pays to pick up the fallen fruit just as soon as it begins to fall. Go over the orchard each week and gather the "drops" and feed to the hogs. By so doing you will destroy many insect pests.

Never cut a limb from a fruit tree unless you know just why you do it. If the rabbits have only gnawed the outer bark wrap the wound with cloth.

Cowpeas or vetch makes a good cover crop for the orchard.

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