

IN THE GREENHOUSE

I am writing this for the month of September on a cold windy and very wet Sunday in early August. At seven o'clock this morning, having heard the weather forecast, armed with string and knife, I secured the dahlias against the worst the weather could do. This evening I have been talking gardening with a very old friend, one Fred Nutbeam, who was for 25 years the head gardener to the Queen at Buckingham Palace. We talked mainly of things that go wrong in the garden, and remedies, old and new for complaints in general and woodlice in particular. These lice can be very troublesome in greenhouses. They eat seedlings and fruit, are partial to peaches and nectarines, and eat holes in the ripening fruit. The old remedy was arsenate of lead and bran, now it has to be the safe B.H.C. and bran, not a dangerous poison, but effective. One or two of the old remedies are still good, although seldom practised and they are much cheaper than their modern counterparts. Permanganate of Potash or Condys Fluid is cheap, a few crystals bought from the chemist - enough crystals to cover a penny in a gallon of water will stop seedlings dampening off. It will stop the rotting of grass on lawns, will clear a lawn of worms if soaked well, and is also a good antidote for rust on carnations and antirrhinums. Flowers of sulphur was used in a blower for mildew, and the main cure for greenfly was soft soap and quassia chips.

But back to work - September is the month to propegate shrubs under polythene in a box or frame, with about four inches of rooting compost in the frames or boxes. The compost is equal parts peat and sand. Hydrangeas root more readily if all the leaves are left on the cuttings. Keep greenhouse atmospheres dryer at this time of year and 'house' all chrysanthemums, fuchsias, geraniums, heliotropes, etc. before October is half way through. Cut back geraniums, and put all the cuttings in pots using the compost. Don't keep them close, a window sill or greenhouse staging will suit. Keep all other cuttings covered with polythene for 3 or 4 weeks. Hard wooded cuttings take longer and various cupressus can remain in the rooting compost until early spring. By that time, the geraniums should be comfortable in individual pots. Pot cineraria seedlings, calceolaria and schyanthus, all require a cool 'airy' atmosphere - never above 50°F.

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