

GARDENING

THE YEAR rolls on, and once more Christmas is about on us, the older you get the faster the years seem to pass! The past year was remarkable for two things, a dry spring and a wet summer; the other way round would be ideal; we are seldom satisfied, so we take what comes and grumble!

I have been spending these darker evenings with the new seed catalogues, the prices are in keeping with the local gradients, the older you get, the steeper they are. Brussels Sprouts, Peer Gynt, fifty seeds are £1.35. Hispi cabbage are just over two pence per seed; keeping caterpillars and slugs as pets can be more expensive than keeping a dog. Carrots, well; old early Nantes, fifteen grammes, (half an ounce), for around £1.50, makes your vegetable growing rather expensive. After the fly, slugs and birds have had the lion's share, it just has to be about the same price as going to the greengrocer, and he does smile at you as he takes your money; that is more than one gets from a caterpillar or a slug.

Talking of carrots, I always sow my last lot of carrots on July the fourteenth. Prior to that date I had sown every two weeks throughout the summer without a single carrot appearing, so in July I thought I would make sure of plenty of succulent little carrots for the autumn and winter. I sowed four packets and I did not have one carrot make an appearance! The only consolation is that I have a lot of slim slugs.

I have had a very, very trying summer with vegetables. The pheasants ate the early cabbage, the caterpillars perforated the sprouts and winter greens, the slugs ruined the potatoes, so I have subsisted on runner beans; it is a good thing my labour is not expensive. Oh! I forgot my onions, I had some good ones; I expect they made the slugs' eyes run!

What about flowers? They like wet weather anyhow, dahlias just loved it, they were the best for years. Geraniums don't like it dull, wet or windy, so they had a poor summer. The roses were good. Almost all of the flowers did well. I wonder after all that rain if the Thames Water Authority will reduce their prices for that commodity. More likely I fear they will increase them, whilst we can at least say that we have plenty of something we can't sell.

What of Christmas? People of a certain age can remember, as I do, one Christmas when everything edible was scarce. A timely stoat killed a rabbit; stuffed, it made our Christmas dinner. The butcher had no meat, there were no currants, sultanas or raisins, so no pudding - a ginger pudding was the substitute. I remember mother's tears at the sparse fare; that was 1916. As I am writing this, the bands at the Cenotaph are playing a Trumpet Voluntary, hence the memory - I make no apologies, the two things, writing of Christmas and the Cenotaph service brought it all back. It is, I am afraid, too much to hope it will never happen again. Good gardening!

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