

## GARDENING

**T**HE PAST WINTER was remarkable for its mildness in this area. There was a cold snap in December when the coldest night showed twelve degrees of frost on the Fahrenheit scale. January was a wet month with lots of wind, followed by a dry February - certainly not the 'fill dyke' of normal years. January and February were almost frost and snow free. However the rough digging that was possible did not benefit from the frost breakdown, so useful for the making of seed beds. We have been able to catch up a little in March, and there is comfort in knowing that come what may, there is always time for sowing and time for harvest. This year will not be an exception. There has been very little frost damage to trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, so provided there are no late frosts, we should have a bounty of fruit and flowers this summer.

I am always commenting on the high price of seeds. They have gone up again this year, and there seems to be fewer seeds in each packet, especially for flowers. May I suggest that if you are on a limited budget, you avoid the classy F1 hybrids, especially of geraniums and impatiens, and concentrate on the many annuals that you can afford. Grow more perennials such as polyanthus, arabis, alyssum, aubrieta, marguerites (especially the Esther Read types), asters etc. Why not try growing your own seed? The Almighty still puts the same number of seeds in each pod. Not easy to produce brassica seed, but carrots, parsnips, turnips and radishes will seed easily. Just plant a couple of each of the whole vegetable in some spare ground and watch them 'go to seed', collect when ready.

Peas and beans have merely to be left to ripen on the vine.

Cauliflowers are expensive. Try about a dozen plants in an odd corner. They need little attention - a sprinkling of fertiliser and a spraying or dusting to keep off the cabbage whites. Now that families are not as large as they once were, vegetable growing is, unfortunately, not as important as it was. However lots can be done on a small patch - twelve cabbages will last the average family a few weeks, and there is no doubt whatever that the produce of your garden or allotment does taste better than the from the shop. Your wife will tell you what she wants most!

And now some of my 'don't forgets' - Have something on hand to cover strawberries, potatoes and any other tender plants, should a late frost be forecast. - Have some insecticide ready to spray against pests; for carrot fly on the rough leaves of the seedlings as soon as they appear; white fly on tomatoes and cucumbers. - To sow a late row of runner beans on June 21st. - To sow late rows of dwarf beans, peas and carrots on July 14th - these dates do work! - To prune shrubs directly the flowering period has finished. Also the time to reduce the size of your lilac or flowering cherry if it has grown too large. When flowering is over, cut out the old wood from rambler roses to give room for the young wood to mature - that's for next year's flowers, but not with climbing roses, for they produce a few late flowers.

I wish you every success with your efforts and a nice shower every week.

A.V.M.