

## GARDENING

**I** WRITE THIS ON VE DAY - the fiftieth anniversary - and I take a long look back across the years to my demob. I see fifty years of work waiting to be done and now it seems, that there is more work waiting to be done than there was fifty years ago. But perhaps age has something to do with that. Wasted time? Certainly not! It has been fifty years of worthwhile effort, of pleasant days, of late frosts and disappointments but also warm gentle rain. Yes, worthwhile and modestly I say, with some success.

The late frosts this year have already caused considerable loss and damage in our gardens. Roses have lost their early breaks, in some cases three times in succession and they will need going over again with the secateurs to remove damaged shoots. There has been exceptional damage to beech trees. I have seen some that leafed early, turning to autumn colouring all over due to frost damage. But we must not complain too much for old Mother Nature will soon hide her scars and already life is brightened by fields of golden rape and this will be followed by the blue haze of linseed.

If you are itching to put out those tender summer bedding plants, please remember that May and early June, as glorious as they may be, are never trustworthy beauties. They can flatter to deceive so don't give them a chance to show how wayward they can be.

There are plenty of tasks ahead. The pruning of early flowering shrubs should be carried out as soon as the blooms have finished. Take back your forsythia to three or four leaves to give those splendid long-flowering sprays as winter ends - there we go, we are anticipating 1996 already!

Prune lilac as soon as they have shed their petals and weigelia and deutzia will profit by being cut down to ground level. At the end of June sow wallflowers, Canterbury bells, myosotis, bellis and any other biennials you will require for next year. A word about primula - polyanthus, primrose and the like. Take the seed from your own plants and sow immediately. This will prove much more successful than the seed from the packet which is not fresh.

Next time I will give you my impressions of Chelsea Flower Show but I do not expect it to be different from previous years. To me Chelsea has become much of a same muchness. But I still look forward to meeting my old friends there.

A. V. Mitchell

