

GARDENING

SO WE WILL START with the autumn jobs, items that have not received their usual pruning and tying, and the herbaceous borders – splitting up of some of the herbaceous plants, phlox and daisies of various denominations. Lift and break off outside growths with about six stems on each, plant them and cast the centre pieces away. Give the michaelmas daisies similar treatment. The daisy tribe, now known under the name of *Argyranthemum*, also grow better if split into individual growing clones at about a foot apart. Paeonies resent being moved so manure is the best way to keep them healthy and flowering well.

Roses on walls – ramblers grow and flower best on the previous year's growth, whereas climbers can be spur pruned. Half prune hybrid tea roses to prevent rocking during the winter gales. Put in cuttings of penstemons in a cold frame for the winter. Don't prune hardy fuchsias until March, the same applies to buddleia. Sow herbaceous seeds about Christmas, as you do large onions, and put in shallots. Prune apples and pears during the winter months. Prune gooseberries in February to prevent birds decimating the fruiting buds during hard weather.

On November 11th 1955 I entered the service of Mr. Michael Astor as gardener, a situation I really wanted. On that day I told my wife that I would end my days in this lovely area,

and forty years on I am still here disturbing the worms and aphids of Oxfordshire. I think I derived more pleasure from disturbing these creatures than they did, or do, and I hope to be able to disturb more of them in the future.

One pest as far as I know has defeated all of my efforts to get the upper hand and that is the destructive vine weevil. I think I have to admit defeat in that instance, and refrain from attempting to grow any members of the primula family, and lots of the genus rosaceae, and one of my most loved subjects, cyclamen, which the weevils devastate as they are coming into flower.

So we turn the pages of 1995 over and try again. The records show for that year the coldest weather at the end of April – three successive nights of about twenty degrees Fahrenheit. Seemingly weeks in July and August with shade temperatures of over ninety degrees and a drought that lasted all the summer. Yes, turn those last two pages of 1995 over and have a fresh start – hopefully.

Christmas decorations are cheap and easy – a handful of wet clay in a saucer, a few short sprigs of holly and sprayed with glitter, it's as easy as falling off a log and costs little.

I wish you a Happy Christmas, and may 1996 be kind to you.

A.V. Mitchell.