

GARDENING

THOSE WHO PRODUCE THIS MAGAZINE need my piece for the February/March issue by the end of the first week in January, the month when gardening has to be done by a roaring fire, with seed and plant catalogues and no interruptions. Only then can one say with honesty, "I love gardening in January". January is the only month in which one does not object too strongly about the price of fuel to heat the greenhouse. Just to creep into a temperature of plus ten on a frosty morning is heavenly indeed, even though it costs about a pound a day.

I hope that all the large onions are sown by now. The seeds are expensive, so one has to make the best use of them and ensure that the size of the onions compensates for the outlay. Onions and sweet peas do not require much warmth, so go to it if you have a small greenhouse. A temperature of ten degrees Celsius is the absolute minimum for tomatoes to germinate and thrive, so do not sow them before mid-March – the heating required for early sowing cannot be justified.

Study your seed catalogue; seedsmen are listing many varieties which have wonderful names and which rarely achieve the claims for them. Those you have known from childhood are the safe bets, what smells sweeter than a bed of wallflowers?

Most of the herbaceous perennials will benefit by division in March. I am talking of phlox, michaelmas daisies, heleniums, chrysanthemums maximum, such as Esther Read and lots more you know.

Split off rooted pieces, plant them where you want them, cover with a sawn-off polythene bottle and they will grow away.

March is also the month to prune back fuchsias and all those winter flowering shrubs such as witch-hazel, viburnum fragrans and its varieties, lonicera henryii, jasminium nudiflorum – all gardens should have one of them because they make such gorgeous cut flowers. Wisterias need pruning back to two or three fat buds.

Now for a line or two about fruit. I have mentioned the green cox apple before, but whatever apple you decide to plant in your garden, please remember that the stock is a very important consideration; M27 is the stock for a garden apple. Bramley is not a good garden apple, it is too vigorous and belongs in an orchard. If you did not do so in the autumn, prune gooseberries and red and white currants in March and also top raspberries and tie them in – as also with the loganberries.

I rarely mention the rose because here by the river, the moist atmosphere seems to induce black spot. I have tried all the recommended cures without success and there has been no encouragement to grow the loveliest of flowers. But English rose is said to be resistant to black spot. The flower resembles the old fashioned rose, full centred, flattish and fragrant, height about three feet.

Soon it will be time for the sowing of the slow growers like lobelia.

V. Mitchell.