

SEASONAL PLANTING NOTES

CALENDAR OF WORK FOR AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

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IN these notes one cannot long avoid reference to weather conditions since these are the main guide in designing working operations in the garden.

August generally experiences a tailing off of the monsoon rains in south-west regions of the Island, temperature becoming very equable in the process; the surface soil in beds and borders becomes very friable and workable and one begins to feel that these are indeed the conditions under which real gardening can be undertaken.

The influence of altitude has to be noted, however, as around elevations of 5,000 to 6,000 feet, and over, strong winds still prevail though these tail off towards the end of the month.

In the north and east and dry zone proper which are not benefited by the south-west there has already commenced a season of long drought, rarely broken before October and till such times little in the way of gardening proper can be undertaken unless copious supplies of water are available.

In the areas with a south-west rainfall, seasonal operations in the month of August are many. It is a very good time for pruning of trees and shrubs and for thinning out the dead or over-crowded branches of fruit trees. This pruning is rarely properly understood in the East since the orthodox principles do not meet requirements of plants that are perpetually in growth and have no proper rest period.

Nevertheless, the cutting back of many of the garden shrubs is more a necessity here than in temperate conditions, for, if this is not done, growth becomes wild and the quality of flower and fruit deteriorates. Now is a very good time to tackle the problem, and particularly as regards the ornamental shrubs such as acahypha, shoeflower, panax, arundo, clerodendron, brunfelsia, lantana (horticultural varieties), but not bougainvillaeas. The normal flowering tree does not often need pruning but occasionally branches become too lanky or overhang

too much and these should be cut back cleanly and the cut surface tarred over. A certain type of flowering tree such as *Cassia multijuga* and *Randia maculata* need to be pruned back hard every second year since it is on the newly made growth that all flowers are produced. To allow these to grow, the natural way of other flowering trees, leads to a paucity of flower and an over-abundance of growth.

In brief, the principles of pruning might be summarized as follows :—

- (1) For fruit trees, thin out branches so as to allow free access of light and air ; remove all dead wood, snags, superfluous suckers and roots.
- (2) Always use a sharp knife or saw, and cut in such a way as to ensure quick healing.
- (3) When cutting back lateral branches, always cut at a fork.
- (4) In removing a large branch, saw it off roughly at about a foot from the trunk, and finally saw off and plane the surface of the stump that remains (cut the under-side first).
- (5) Treat all wound-surfaces with coal tar preventing thereby the entry of moisture or parasitic fungi.
- (6) Cut in a slanting or upright direction so that when completed and treated rain is thrown off naturally.
- (7) In general, pruning should be performed when growth is least active, but it should not be done during a drought period.

It is stated above that bougainvillaeas should not be pruned and there is a very good reason for this. Normally the gardener plants this shrub and allows it to grow at will. The sequence is a succession of long tall shoots resulting in bare stems for 4 or 5 feet from the ground and long drooping shoots with clusters of flowers at the terminals only. The correct procedure is, after planting, to fix 3 or 4 stout stakes or irons in the form of a triangle or square around the plant and as the plant sends out its long branches bend these in a downward or horizontal direction and tie securely to the stakes or irons. A bush is then formed with foliage down to the ground, and as the plant grows and sends out further shoots these too must be pulled down and tied in. In effect the result is that the sun beats down on the bush, ripening the whole shoot, and flowers appear laterally all along the shoot instead of merely at the tip or the terminal flower which results from a bush left to form itself normally.

Many requests for information in this respect and on the best position for bougainvillaea (and shoe-flower shrubs) are received and it may here be mentioned that bougainvillaea must have a well-drained site, an open position, and some form

of root restriction if these are to be grown successfully under our humid conditions. Its natural home is the dry and sunny parts of South America, yet we possess most of the best varieties and with proper treatment grow them to perfection.

Most of the varieties strike root from cuttings, the varieties "Rosa Catalina" and "Laterita" being the exceptions, provided they are given ample sand in the propagating beds. When rooted it is best to grow them on in some form of tub or tin—at Peradeniya tar barrels cut into two and cleansed are very satisfactory—with plenty of old bricks for drainage and a good but light soil in which to grow. They remain in these until the first flowers are produced after which they are given selected sites on either mounds or well-drained positions in the full exposure to all the sun possible. They are not taken out of the tin or tar barrel but planted intact and, to further assist good drainage, holes are made in the barrel by driving an *alavango* through the sides here and there.

Orchid potting can now be undertaken, though this in fact applies to the greater part of the year, except only in the hot and dry months, according to the species grown. The time to pot is usually after flowering and before new growth commences, and that is when the plant is in its most dormant stage. A good serviceable mixture for epiphytes consists of broken crocks (flower pots or tiles), sphagnum moss, charcoal, old fern or bracken roots, well-leached coir fibre or coconut husks, and old bark of trees. The mixture should be clean, well chopped and mixed, and used sparingly. Do not overpot, that is, keep to a small-sized pot as long as possible and see there is ample drainage. The plant potted should more or less sit on the compost rather than be buried in it. For terrestrial or ground orchids some loam or well-decomposed cattle manure should be included together with a portion of steamed bones and in this type of orchid the plant can be potted deeper in the soil than with epiphytes.

All preparations should this month be made in up-country gardens for sowing seed of annuals and biennials required for a good show next year, the sowings being made next month. Cuttings of begonias, abutilon, iresine, santolina, perewinkle, berberis, cineraria, anthericums, and such like can be put into beds or boxes for planting out at the end of the year into beds and borders.

Among the vegetables, artichokes should be coming along and planting out from boxes or sowing direct of quick crops such as peas, beans, spinach, beet, cabbage, carrot, knol-kohl, lettuce and the like can be made to ensure crops before the worst of the north-east monsoon sets in.

There is little scope in the dry regions at this time of the year beyond reaping in dry-grain crops. The mango crops have come to an end and the palmyra fruit season begins. Cultivated lands will now be prepared for onions, betel, kurakkan and the like.

Budding and grafting in the low moist zones are very satisfactory operations under August climatic conditions and, where rootstocks are available and are of sufficient age, this work should proceed. The rootstocks for grapefruit, orange, and mandarin are undoubtedly rough lemon and the sour orange. Mangoes too bud well since the sap is well on the move and most varieties, especially the *wal-amba*, are useful as rootstocks. The wild mango, *etamba*, is of very slow growth in its young stage and is best budded *in situ*, and for these reasons it is not generally recommended at this stage. Budding methods are the inverted tee for citrus and rectangular patch for mangoes. Buds from only the very best and highest quality fruit trees should be used.

Normally the fruit-grower prefers to purchase the ready made plant, but raising one's own requirements should be given attention to on economic grounds. The sources of supply of seeds are gradually expanding and the Horticultural Division of the Department of Agriculture is always ready to advise as to sources of supply should difficulty arise.

September is generally a busy month though not to the extent of the previous month. Dry weather persists in the low country dry zones and in the moist zones a dry spell is usually experienced also. Watering of the new plantings put out during June–July may be needed and mulches of grass cuttings and the like should be applied to beds and borders and to trees or shrubs planted individually.

The gardens in the low moist zones should now be giving a deal of colour and one might now give some consideration to improvement in arrangement and colour in the flower borders for next season. It is generally noted that reds and yellows predominate with a paucity of blue flowers. Where this is so a note should be made to introduce small groups of such blue colour annuals and perennials that are fairly easily grown, for instance the blue plumbago, anchusa, exacum, salvia (several species but notably *Salvia farinacea* with *Salvia patens* up country) angelonia, the small blue China aster, browallia, torenia and the blue-mauve forms of petunia.

For the more permanent features of the border or shrubbery there is a large variety of flowering shrubs available which vary between 3 and 6 feet in height. A good selection covering a wide range of colour both in flower and foliage would include

uroskinnera, mussanda, rondeletia, calliandra, achanea, brunfelsia, clerodendron, acalypha, (*Acalypha torta* and other bright colour leaf varieties) graphtophyllum, hibiscus, kopsia, and for the taller shrubs for background randia, caesalpinia, *Lagerstroemia indica*, holmskioldia and hamelia. Bougainvillaeas are best grown in isolation rather than in mixed beds or borders. For drier areas a good selection of shrubs would include oleander, caesalpinia, pandanus, achanea, *Clerodendron inerme*, sophora, punica, *Lagerstroemia indica*, the beautiful *Tabernaemontana coronaria* of both single and double forms, and the common but not to be despised croton or codiaenum.

Towards the end of the month preparations can be made for the north-east planting season which season covers the whole Island and is in general the main planting season of the year.

A list giving a brief description of the main garden requirements of such bed and border plants is available free on application to Peradeniya and advantage should be taken of the fact.

Where plantings of flowering and shade trees or of fruit trees are anticipated, the holes should be excavated as soon as possible to allow the soil to settle well before actual planting takes place and if possible a month should elapse between refilling the holes and planting. With fruit plants this is very essential for generally if plantings are made in newly-filled holes the plant sinks as the soil settles resulting in too deep planting and subsequent water-logging. If it is realized that natural sinkage, even in a hard-rammed bed, amounts to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches for every foot depth excavation, it will be appreciated that a loosely-filled $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet hole can well sink 9 to 10 inches below original level at time of filling.

Up-country, the month is a busy one as it is now that the majority of the season's (February-May) annuals must be sown, and pricked out. Sowings are generally made in boxes, pans or in covered beds in positions facing the east, and whether pots, boxes, or sheds are used, the soil for sowing in must be fine, light and rich. A sprinkling of sand should be added to render it porous and well-decayed cattle manure should be rubbed fine before mixing with the soil. Sow small quantities at intervals rather than all at once, keeping the balance seed in air-tight tins or bottles. Such plants as verbenas and petunias which are normally raised from cuttings should be put in during the month and be ready for November-December plantings. Dahlias which have now finished flowering should be cut down, allowed to remain in the soil for a fortnight, then lifted and stored in a dry shed for replanting in November-December next.