

SEASONAL PLANTING NOTES

CALENDAR OF WORK FOR FEBRUARY

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THE month of February is usually one of dry conditions, particularly in the south-west parts of the Island, and any planting or seed-sowing should be done only if a good supply of pipe, tank or well water is available.

Where such a supply of water is available, successions of annual flower seeds can be raised as can, also, the quicker-growing vegetables, for the nights are cool and the mornings heavy with dew. It will be wise, however, when contemplating such sowings to soak the bed well overnight ready for sowing the next morning, and the use of a few cadjans or a layer of straw over the bed surface till the seedlings appear through the ground is recommended.

There is no question of the fact that a good garden soil is one that possesses good "body". On estates and on farms chemical manures are generally used in quantity, but mostly from necessity also. These chemicals, used liberally, produce and create good yields but they do not assist in increasing soil fertility. For this purpose farmyard manure and other forms of humus are required, and it is here that lawn mowings come in useful. Compost pits, where all lawn mowings, leaves, sweepings, and in fact anything in the way of garden waste (except hard wood stuff) can be stored and treated are a necessity in any garden.

There are many methods of composting and for those that have time to practise and supervise it the Indore process is probably the best, but the Adco method also gives satisfactory results.

The general and common garden method is, however, to spread out all garden refuse, which has been collected, into a layer of about a foot thick, and cover with a 2-inch layer of lawn mowings. The heap should then be dressed with a dusting of calcium cyanamide or sulphate of ammonia at half an ounce to a square yard over which should be sprinkled a thin layer of wood ash and of soil. Repeat again, making the refuse heap 2 feet high. This should then be well trodden down and

periodically watered, but those possessing a cattle shed in the vicinity can with advantage utilize the urine and floor washings instead.

The heap should be turned and re-stacked after 15 days, and again after a period of 20 days when the material should be left for another month to mature fully.

Indications are given in the previous months' calendars as to varieties of vegetables to grow and those calendars should be consulted. Most people now know that, from the point of view of nutrition, a combination of cereals and legumes is strongly to be recommended, but much advantage is gained by variety in diet. In the first report—Part I of the Committee of Nutrition in the Colonial Empire—published recently it states “where a diet is (as in this country) and may have to remain predominantly vegetarian the chief deficiency may well be in calcium, and among the plant products green leafy vegetables alone furnish a satisfactory means of repairing this deficiency”. Also “an important point in regard to the value of green leafy vegetables as a source of food is their perishable nature. Experiment has confirmed that with wilting and injury such as occur in storage and transit there is a marked and growing loss of vitamin C and the precursor of vitamin A. It is therefore desirable that this class of vegetable should be eaten wherever possible shortly after removal from the ground”.

The leafy vegetables referred to would include spinach, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, kales, amaranthus, and colocasias among others. Lettuce, however, takes first place as it can be eaten uncooked. The loss of vitamins that occur when vegetables wilt or have to be stored, makes it the more important that as large a proportion as possible of foodstuffs should be grown by the people who consume them.

Among seasonal operations, in the north and east the paddy crops will be ripening, and there is yet time to sow dry grain such as gingelly, kurakkan, peas, and kollu as soon as the main crops are harvested. Tobacco plantings need careful attention, and also water at this time.

In other parts of the Island, some attention should now be given to conserving moisture in the soil for if the dry spell has not already commenced, it will do so soon. Beds and borders, therefore, should be weeded, the surface stirred and some form of mulch applied, and in this respect grass mowings serve a very useful purpose. Should the drought season have arrived, systematic watering will become necessary but in watering a great point to remember is that any bed, border, or even a pot plant that is watered, should be given an ample supply. It is much better for the plant if the soil is well soaked at

intervals of several days rather than if a small sprinkling of water is made daily. In the former case, the roots and rootlets get down into the soil where the moisture is, whilst in the latter, light watering only moistens the surface of the soil and the rootlets are brought to the surface with consequent damage to them as the moisture dries out rapidly during the hot hours of the day.