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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

THURSDAY, October 26, 1933

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

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Subject: "Indoor Gardens." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry,
U.S.D.A.

My grandmother often used to say that a few blooms in the sunny south window gladdened the heart on a winter day. She had an idea that indoor gardens added to the family's good cheer when the days were grey outside and the snow was beating against the window pane.

I guess most of us would enjoy a little indoor garden of some sort during the winter, but many of us no longer have the old-fashioned housekeeper's skill in growing house plants. We're not wise in plant lore. I well remember when I was a small girl how my grandmother would cover her favorite flowers out in the garden with sheets and newspapers to protect them from the first frosts in the fall. And I remember how she would lift the choicest plants, set them in tubs or flower pots, and bring them indoors for protection. Some of these plants survived their bringing-in. A few wilted and finally died. I've known lots of housekeepers who, like my mother, just couldn't bear to see the frost come and ruin all their garden blooms. Whether the plants that come indoors live or not, depends on the way you take them up and handle them and on the amount of light and sunshine that you give them in the house. That's what our garden advisor, W.R.B. says. And he knows the secrets of indoor as well as outdoor gardens.

I asked W.R.B. about taking up geraniums and other large plants from the garden and bringing them into the house for winter. He said this didn't pay. He advised making a few cuttings to start in the house for the winter but discarding the old plants that have been growing in the garden all summer. Here's what he said about starting those cuttings:

"Root them in a box of sand kept in a warm place. Later, place the rooted cuttings in pots or boxes of good soil and they will be ready to set in the flower borders next spring. Large plants are a nuisance in the house and they seldom are good plants to set out by the time spring comes."

Another old-fashioned favorite for the indoor garden is the begonia. W.R.B. recommends the begonia highly as a houseplant. You can start this plant from clippings, just as you do geraniums, or you can trim back one of the large begonias and it will form new growth and blossom during the winter. W.R.B. says that several small begonias like the prima Donna variety, will bloom continuously all winter if you can give them a place where they'll have plenty of sunshine. The begonia semperflorens insists on blooming even while the cuttings are in the sand box to form roots. The rex begonia is noted for its handsome foliage and delicate bloom. A number of begonias are grown mainly for their foliage but a lot of other varieties are fine for blooming.

What do begonias need to grow well indoors? Plenty of warmth and sunshine, for one thing. Rather loose and slightly porous soil with good drainage, for another. Of course, you mustn't let them dry out. Few plants can stand that. On the other hand be very careful not to overwater begonias since that makes them shed their leaves. Just moderate amount of drink is what these temperate plants want. By the way, perhaps you've noticed that some begonia plants are very subject to attack by a little insect known as the red spider. W.R.B. says an occasional syringing of the foliage with cold water will rid it of these insects.

So much for geraniums and begonias. Now about house ferns. W.R.B. says that ferns, especially those of the Boston or the sword fern type, are some of the most satisfactory foliage plants for the house in winter. Many indoor garden enthusiasts tell me that they get more solid enjoyment from a thriving fern than from almost any other house plant. Yet many people have hard luck with ferns. W.R.B. says this is often because they have the mistaken idea of ferns always out of the sunlight and in the shadow. Ferns will get along for a time without any sunlight. That's true, but they grow best when they have a reasonable amount of direct sunlight. Often they don't thrive in a west window where they get the full force of the hot afternoon sun, but most varieties need some mild sunlight at least. Even the little maiden hair fern, which you find growing outdoors in deep woods, needs its quota of sunshine but it does best if the sun is filtered through the foliage of larger growing plants.

W.R.B. has some helpful advice about bulbs for winter blooms, too. He says that one of the easiest bulbs to force in the house is the paper white narcissus. All you need for this flower is a shallow dish of water and a few pebbles to hold the bulbs in position. Don't put anything in the dishes but the bulbs, the stones and the water. You can place six to ten rather large bulbs in one dish, or you can place the bulbs singly in the top of a narrow-necked vase with the lower tip of the bulb just touching the water. When you first put the bulbs in water, keep them in a cool place, so the roots will form first. Then gradually bring them into a warmer place where they will get plenty of light. That will start the flowering. Just remember for best growth not to place the bulbs in deep dishes and not to cover them with water. They only want water around the base of the bulbs where the roots form.

Tomorrow: "Hallowe'en Hints."

