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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

TUESDAY, June 4, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information approved by the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S.D.A.

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The flower gardeners are to have their innings today. Today all the questions up for reply come from people interested in growing flowers for home gardens. And the answers to these questions come from plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The first question is about starting flower seeds in sand. A gardener writes: "Will you give me directions for growing flower seeds in sand? I understand young plants grown in sand don't have so much trouble with damping-off diseases."

The plant scientists say you can start seeds in clean sand, or sterilized soil. Either will help control damping-off diseases.

If you use sand, use clean builders' sand or a clean supply direct from a sand pit. Then give the sand several washings with boiling water. Have the sand in a pail or tub. Pour on boiling water. Stir the sand with a wooden spoon laddle. Then pour off the dirty water. Repeat the process several times.

You'll also want to scald the seed pans or "flats" before you put the clean sand in. Then plant the seeds in rows and cover with scalded sand.

As soon as the seedlings are large enough to handle, transplant them to pots or trays containing good loamy soil. Water the plants moderately. After they become established give them plenty of sunlight and fresh air. As a precaution against damping-off do not, sow the seeds too thickly, and thin the plants to prevent crowding.



This method of planting seeds in clean sand has been especially successful with flowers like phlox, petunias, calendulas, hollyhocks, larkspurs, marigolds, and snap dragons.

Now in case you don't happen to know what damping-off diseases are, here's what plant scientists say about them. They say they cause much trouble when seeds are planted in cold frames, or small boxes in the house. Small plants may suddenly fall over and die, or black, dead patches may appear on the stems near the soil. These dwarf and kill the plants. The diseases usually attack seedlings that have been kept too warm, or watered too much, or not thinned enough. Young tomato plants and cabbages and other vegetable seedlings suffer from damping-off as well as flowers.

Now here's the second question. This is about caring for your bulbs after they have bloomed. Says a gardener: "Please tell me how to care for daffodil and tulip bulbs so they'll go on blooming in the garden year after year."

To insure good bloom year after year from daffodil or tulip bulbs, always cut off the flower heads as soon as they wither. This saves the bulb the effort of forming seeds. Then, after the blossoms have gone, give the plants liquid fertilizer for extra nourishment. Never cut the leaves until they begin to turn brown. The leaves help the bulbs store nourishment for next year.

Now here's a question about cutting back plants. A gardener wants to know: "Is it true that cutting back flowering vines or tall plants brings more blossoms?"

Cutting back encourages some plants to bloom more because it makes them branch more and each branch may produce blossoms. Morning-glory, snap dragons, and chrysanthemums are good examples. Don't let morning-glories climb too high. Snip off the top, and they'll branch at the sides, and fill in to the roots more solidly.

Here's another question: "My neighbor has been telling me about using



layers of peatmoss in the garden to keep down weeds. Is this a good practice?"

Yes, you can use peatmoss as a summer mulch to save moisture, and also keep down weeds in the garden. Put on the peatmoss in a 2-inch layer as soon as the plants are well started and have been given at least a couple of cultivations. The moss will help keep down weeds so will save you some weeding.

Last question: "Where can a beginning gardener get reliable information on growing annuals?"

The answer is: From a Farmer's bulletin published by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The name of the bulletin is: "Growing Annual Flowering Plants." The number of the bulletin is: 1171. And the bulletin is free as long as the supply lasts. To get a copy, just write to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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