The cultivation of the chrysanthemums

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The Cultivation of Chrysanthemums

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Fig. 1.—A typical medium-sized decorative Chrysanthemum.

In a land such as this where roses, dahlias, zinnias and asters flower so generously in the autumn, the chrysanthemum does not, perhaps, command quite the same affection as it does in colder countries where it is almost invariably the autumn flower supreme.

Nevertheless, with its various forms, splendid colours and long-lasting qualities, the chrysanthemum still retains a considerable popularity and a popularity which is again increasing. The most widely-grown type of chrysanthemum in this State is that known as the single, but the anemone-flowered, the large and medium-sized decoratives and the large Japanese incurves are all being cultivated in increasing numbers.

All kinds are easy to grow and all are easy to propagate. There are two ways of raising new plants—from cuttings, and by dividing and replanting portions of the old stools. It is generally accepted that cuttings always produce the best plants.

PROPAGATION BY CUTTINGS

Cuttings may be raised at any time during September and October for transplanting in November and December. Only plants which produced satisfactory flowers during the previous season and are in a thoroughly healthy condition should be used for propagation.

Cuttings taken from the growths appearing at the base of the old stools (see drawing) are preferable to those produced on the stems, although in the case of varieties that fail to make sufficient basal growths, there is no option but to take stem cuttings. When this has to be done, the lower ones should be selected.

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The type of cuttings which make the best plants are those of moderate thickness and preferably of a wiry nature. Large, thick, soft cuttings rarely make good plants. Some days before taking the cuttings it is a good plan to give the old stools or clumps a thorough watering. This will have the effect of making all growths turgid and fresh, and, when in this condition, they will subsequently retain their condition better while rooting.

The most suitable cuttings are those about 3 in. or 4 in. long and these should be cut straight across at the bottom or lower end with a sharp knife (or razor blade) immediately below a leaf node or joint. They can be raised by inserting them about a third of their length in shallow boxes or pots filled with a light, sandy-soil compost. When raising the cuttings in boxes, they should be spaced about 4 in. apart each way; when pots are used they should be spaced evenly around the margin. The soil should be well firmed around the base of the cuttings during the planting and, afterwards, they should be thoroughly watered with a fine-rosed watering can. The cuttings will root quite easily without any artificial aid, but quicker rooting and bigger root systems can be secured by dipping them in a hormone rooting powder before planting.

The cuttings should be kept in shaded positions which are sheltered from wind until rooting has taken place when they should be moved gradually into full sunshine. The cuttings must never be allowed to become dry; on the other hand over-watering must be avoided.

Most single chrysanthemums in this State are grown in beds or borders—sometimes in masses and often in clumps situated here and there among other flowers. Used either way, they are most attractive in the garden. Those who grow the singles for cut-flower purposes only usually confine them to beds in the back garden where the removal of blooms will not detract from the appearance of the home surroundings.

The large and medium-sized decoratives, as well as the Japanese incurves, can also be grown in beds in the garden, but to obtain the finest flowers from these types, they are best grown in pots where their requirements can be more readily supplied.
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PREPARING BEDS

Ground in which single or other kinds of chrysanthemums are to be grown should be dug over a month beforehand. During the digging over, a generous layer of animal manure or vegetable compost, plus a dressing of potato manure (E), used at the rate of a handful to the square yard, should be well mixed through the top spit of soil. Double digging is unnecessary, since the plants obtain all their requirements from the top 9 in. of soil.

When transplanting the rooted cuttings, lift them out of the boxes or pots with as little disturbance of the roots as possible and plant them just a trifle deeper than before. It is important that young chrysanthemums should be firmly planted and they should be thoroughly watered immediately after planting to eliminate any air pockets which may have formed around the roots.

Whether grown in clumps or large groups, chrysanthemums should be spaced about 18 in. apart and stakes to support them should be placed in position at planting time.

POTTING

Chrysanthemums which are to be grown in pots should first be potted into 5 in. pots. When these are well filled with roots, the plants should be moved into 9 or 10 in. pots or even larger tins. At one time it was considered essential that chrysanthemums should be potted three times, first into 4 in. pots, then into 6 in. pots, and finally into 9 or 10 in. pots, but experiments conducted at the John Innes Research Station showed that so much potting was quite unnecessary.

For the first potting a compost composed of two parts of loam, one part of old animal manure and a half-part of sand should be prepared and to every barrow-load of this mixture should be added a 5 in. potful of potato manure (E).

For the final potting the compost should be composed of three parts loam, one part old animal manure, one part compost, half-part sand and half-part of wood ashes. To every barrow load of this mixture should be added a 4 in. potful of potato manure (E) and a 4 in. potful of blood and bone.

Feeding should commence a few weeks after the plants are moved into the larger pots and be continued until the flower buds are well developed and showing colour. Liquid fowl and liquid cow manure are both excellent plant foods and could be used on alternate weeks. On the other weeks the pots could be dressed with a sprinkle of blood and bone and sulphate of potash.
Many chrysanthemums do not branch satisfactorily or early enough unless they are "stopped." Instead of branching, the central stem grows up and up until it is tall and lanky. Stopping is merely the cutting or pinching out of the growing tip, or a little more, of the plant.

With the singles and small semi-doubles grown in the garden, one stopping is usually sufficient to cause sufficient breaks (or branches) and this may be done between the middle and end of January. There is no reason why it should not be done later if desired, but late stopping merely means later flowers.

With most of the larger decoratives and Japanese incurves grown in pots, the best flowers are those produced by what are known as second crown buds. To obtain these the plants must be stopped twice. The time of the first stopping is not important. Remove the tip of the main stem as soon as the plants are forward enough to give three good breaks (branches) and allow only three branches to grow.

The second stop should be made about the end of January or early in February by removing the tip of each of the three breaks. Allow only two shoots to grow on each, thus giving six stems per plant. Six stems per plant should provide six splendid flowers.

If more flowers per plant are required, then more breaks must be allowed, but the flowers will be smaller.

Chrysanthemums are really very hardy and require no coddling. Keep them well tied to stakes, feed and water them when necessary, and I am sure you will be well satisfied with the results. Should the plants be worried by grubs, worms, or aphis at any time give them an occasional dusting with a dust containing DDT and BHC and you will have no further worries.

We regret the omission of the popular "Farm and Home" section from this issue—particularly as the omission is due to the illness of Miss H. M. Gloster, who has conducted the feature since its inception. We know that readers will join with the editorial staff in wishing Miss Gloster a speedy recovery.

Miss B. Cleeve, who deputised for Miss Gloster in the March-April issue, has prepared an article on cake-icing for the July-August number.