

TABLE DECORATIONS.

THERE is scarcely anything that better enables a lady to display her taste than does the ornamentation of her dinner table.

It is now very much the fashion to put only one kind of flower, or only flowers of one colour, on table, with, of course, plenty of green; it is much easier to arrange them effectively this way than with a variety of colours.

Unsuitable flowers should never be put together; some, such as iris, camellias, arums, sunflowers, look best alone; again, some from their colours are quite unfit for candlelight, so should not be used.

It is a mistake to put many blossoms with strong perfumes on a table; they make a room oppressive. Hyacinths, daphnes, gardenias, &c., must on this account be used sparingly, but lately none of these flowers have been very much in vogue; sunflowers, daffodils, single dahlias, red berries, white lilies, anemones, and large daisies have been favourites with many people. A short time ago the rage for large yellow daisies was so great that they became as expensive to purchase as hothouse flowers.

I would not advise anyone to decorate their table with a particular flower because it is "the fashion"; there are other things to be considered—the room, the glass, the china, particularly the dessert service; for however pretty a decoration, if not in keeping with the surroundings it must be a failure. Stands of flowers on a table should not exceed thirteen inches in height, save perhaps some flower spikes, light grasses or leaves that stand up, or plants and palms may be used that are over twenty inches high, so that the guests can see across the table under them. In arranging flowers too many are generally used; they are packed together so that the beauty of each particular flower is lost instead of each blossom standing lightly with green about it. It is a good plan to heap wet silver sand in flower dishes, and cover it with common lycopodium, or with picked wet moss, and small glasses can be filled with lycopodium or moss; the flowers keep much better in place, and the green makes a good background.

The following are some of the styles of table decoration now in fashion:—

Fill a large meat plate and two pudding plates with wet sand heaped high and covered with moss; make a border of French ferns round each plate, then fill them with white flowers (the new white corymbiums look very well), and put a width of crimson plush bordered with a narrow tufted fringe down the centre of the table; put the three plates of flowers on it, the large in the centre and the small six inches from either end of the plush, then stand round the table specimen glasses, filled with white and green, and between the plates of flowers glass troughs or glass boats, filled like the specimen glasses, may be placed.

Pale blue satin laid down the centre of a table is pretty, with a border of dark leaves placed on it, and the vases filled with large yellow daisies and maidenhair fern. Daisies arrange best in small things; they look very well in the glass centrepieces that are formed with small glasses, and can be lightly arranged so as not to intercept the view across the table. For this kind of arrangement it is necessary to run wire up the stems of both the daisies and the ferns; they may then, with the aid of a little moss, be arranged to look informal and pretty. Old gold-coloured plush and satin, and black satin embroidered in gold, I have also seen used.

I prefer either a plate glass plateau or the white cloth for the centre of the table to any more fantastical arrangements.

At a party last season I heard a Royal

Academician, who might be taken as an authority in matters of taste, tell his hostess what a relief the simplicity of her table was after seeing many elaborately decorated ones. In his opinion plush and satin centres were unsuitable, therefore in bad taste. The table in question had three elegantly shaped white glass baskets, a moderate sized one for the middle and two small ones for the ends; these baskets were filled with lycopodium, and then had a few Marshal Niel roses with their leaves and some maidenhair fern stuck in them. There were also eight glasses on the table, about seven inches high, with triangular openings at the top filled in the same way; these were placed four on each side of the table, which was laid for sixteen people. A row of dark leaves and maidenhair fern was placed on the tablecloth, as if to connect the eight flower vases.

Flower baskets have not been considered altogether successful for table decorations; the reason is that they have been too large and have had too many flowers in them, so that the effect has been heavy. The table I have just mentioned was not an expensive one to arrange, for though the flowers were good there were not many of them. The *menus* for this table were plain, the dessert *oyleys* were fine white linen, with the edges frayed out; they were very delicately worked in deep gold-coloured silk.

I think the best decorated table I have ever seen was one on which there was not a single flower; foliage was used entirely. It is hardly possible, without hothouses to gather from, to carry out a foliage decoration well; one requires scarlet, crimson, yellow, white, and green leaves. The best plants for the purpose are begonias, crotons (of which the leaves are yellow, red, and green,) the dark leaved aralias, dracenas, caladiums, and coleus. Foliage arranges well in low stands, and trails from the stands on to the tablecloth look well; a great deal, too, may be done on the tablecloth itself with leaves of this kind, which last well all the evening. Stands of foliage are more difficult to arrange than any others, for both the form and colour of the leaves have to be considered.

A table looks very well arranged with branches and leaves of virginia creeper when the leaves are changing colour. Some maple leaves are also very pretty. Asparagus Plumosus is elegant for decorations. With a silver plateau water lilies look well on table. They must be arranged in a very low dish; each lily must be well opened with the fingers before it is put in water (water is much better than sand for them), and they must not be left in the dark after they are arranged. In the troughs round the plateau and in the specimen glasses, blue forget-me-nots or small yellow water lilies can be arranged with grasses or ferns.

African marigolds make an effective decoration, but they are best used without other flowers, and require light-coloured fern leaves with them. Hyacinths, if picked from their stems and each single bloom mounted on wire, are most useful with other flowers to stand high and prevent a flat appearance. Jonquils, daffodils, and lilies of the valley look well either alone or with other flowers. In Nice I once saw a little table ornamented with lilies of the valley and large bouquets of violets and maidenhair fern. The stands had borders of fern, then the violets were massed but rather raised in the centre, and the lilies stuck in separately. It was pretty, but I thought rather disappointing.

When much fern cannot be had, feathery grass is very pretty among flowers. A stand of ordinary garden flowers is often much

improved by a rice bunch of grass being placed in the middle, and a few pieces being put round the edge of it.

Grasses are particularly useful with field flowers; these are more difficult to arrange than cultivated ones, but well repay one for the trouble. They suit some tables remarkably well. Blue cornflowers, buttercups, and large daisies with grasses and trails of small ivy, make very pretty stands; so do the marsh marigold, purple candytuft, mallows, pleasants eye, honeysuckle, sainfoin, and many other wild flowers and plants, provided they are judiciously arranged; but they must not be massed together, nor must too many kinds of flowers be used in the same stand.

We have as yet only considered cut flower decorations, but many people prefer plants; stands take so long to arrange that one is often tempted to use plants. Palms, stood in suitable pots or bowls, always look extremely well, and are more used than any other plants, for they intercept the view across a table less than anything else of the same size; then, too, they always have a cool look. A long table with a palm of one kind in the centre and two others of a different kind for the two ends, with glass troughs filled with crimson roses and ferns arranged down the table, looks very well. Good palms are expensive, but the umbrella plants (*Cyperias*) make very good centres; they last well, and are not dear to purchase. Ferns in pots are not used nearly as much for table decoration as they used to be. Frequently single cut branches of plants are used; they are stuck in artistic pots or vases, to look as if they were growing. The scarlet amaryllis, the turk's head lily, white or violet iris—all look handsome on table; a stem of corymbium or of a dahlia, if in a suitable pot, will furnish a table. I have found it a very good plan to preserve ferns (especially maidenhair) for winter use; they can be preserved to look almost as if they were fresh gathered. They are green and pliable if properly done, and I do not think when on table anyone could detect that they were dried. Everlasting flowers are also very pretty for winter use. I buy the plants in the summer when they are in bloom; when the green begins to fade I cut the flowers, tie them in bunches, and hang them up to dry, bloom downwards. I prefer the pink and the white, and find them the most useful. So much green is wanted for a table that it is worth while to grow the common lycopodium in flat pans. Sift some peat, mix a little silver sand with it, mixing it well in the centre, then stick lycopodium all over the peat, and put the pans in a warm place and keep them moist, and they will soon look beautiful; the lycopodium rapidly covers the peat; and if single flowers of any kind are then stuck in, the effect is very pretty. Snowdrops, camellias, winter roses, scarlet geraniums—any thing, in fact, looks well in a pan of well-grown lycopodium.

For large dinners, candles are almost invariably used; they have small shades over them; these shades are ornamental, and generally coloured; they may be made at home, but require the neatest of work, as every imperfection shows when the light is under them. Rose coloured shades are, I think, the prettiest; very pale green are pleasant on a warm evening, but not generally as satisfactory as any shade of red.

In conclusion I would advise my readers to let the ornamentation of their table be in keeping with the dinner to be served; do not, when you have a comparatively plain dinner, deck your table as if for a large party. I do not mean that the table should be as plain as the dinner, but it should be such as not to disappoint your guests.