

## FLOWERS AS CHRISTMAS GIFTS

By Phebe Westcott Humphreys

**I**N planning for Christmas giving we often find upon our list of acquaintances those whom we would remember with some slight token, and we gladly turn to the flowers as a happy solution. Not only to these distant acquaintances and relatives, but to the dear ones to whom we would offer our best gifts, will flowers often prove acceptable at Christmas-time. As far as possible use original ideas in selecting, preparing and presenting these floral gifts, and aim to have them appropriate. To the friend who has a well-filled conservatory the gift of a few plants will be but little appreciated, unless some new suggestion is offered with them. To those who have only shady windows the plants which require plenty of sunshine for successful development will prove a care instead of a pleasure. To the friend who has "no luck with flowers," which in reality means no real love for them nor patience to study their habits, it would be foolish to offer the capricious orchid, or any of the frail bloomers that need special petting. Give, instead, some well grown sturdy bloomer, which will demand little attention and be sure to succeed in spite of difficulties.

### THE CHINESE SACRED LILY

**T**O one who has never grown this dainty "lily of the gods" it will prove a most acceptable Christmas offering. It is hard to realize that these dry brown bulbs will form thriving plants, with a mass of tall green foliage and several flower stalks bearing fragrant white lilies, within twenty-five days from the time they are started in a dish of water. If you would have them in bloom on Christmas Day start the bulbs the last of November or first of December. Fill a glass dish nearly full of pebbles so that the bulb, when set, will stand a little above the top. A rather deep dish is preferred, as it will hold more water, and allow plenty of room for the roots to extend down and twine around the pebbles. If it is impossible to obtain the smooth, round white pebbles, any small pieces of broken stone will do, or anything that will support the bulb and hold it in place. A few pretty shells laid over the top and next to the glass will give a pretty effect. Place a few pieces of charcoal among the pebbles to keep the water fresh. Set the bulb on the pebbles in the centre of the dish, and pile them up about it until it is held firmly in place. Then fill the dish with water until it merely touches the bottom of the bulb. It is not necessary to set the dish away in the dark for the bulb to form roots. Give it a place on a sunny plant shelf as soon as it is started, and in a few days little tufts of green will be found peeping up. Within two or three weeks the bowl will be filled with white roots, while the green reed-like leaves will form a glossy mass a foot or more in height. As the flower stalks appear, bearing many of the greenish-white buds, they will be watched with interest until the first fragrant white blossom opens. Florists claim that these lilies may be forced to bloom within fifteen days from the time the bulb is set, but they develop more slowly in the hands of the amateur, and it is best to allow from twenty to twenty-six days.

### APPROPRIATE FOR AN INVALID

**O**NE of these bulbs in full bloom, with another just starting into growth, will make a most acceptable gift for a sick friend. The dreary, monotonous days will seem to pass more rapidly while the interest continues in the rapid development of the plant. The blooming lily will be greatly appreciated, but will give but slight enjoyment compared with the one just starting, which will be watched so eagerly and enjoyed so thoroughly from the time the first white rootlet begins to reach down among the pebbles, and the first green sprout appears. Still another lily bulb planted in a pot of soil, might be presented with those growing in the water. It will develop more slowly than the others, continuing the pleasure for a longer time, and can be replanted the following winter, while those grown in the water will be comparatively worthless after blooming. But if only one bulb is to be presented start it in water instead of the soil, for half the pleasure in the gift is found in the odd cultivation and the surprisingly rapid growth. If charcoal is placed among the pebbles it will not be necessary to supply fresh water often, with the exception of the little that is allowed for evaporation. But if for any reason it seems stale, do not attempt to pour it out of the dish, but allow a small stream to flow in slowly and gently, so that the roots may not be displaced.

### INTEREST THE CHILDREN

**F**LOWERS help to refine and purify all who take an interest in them, and we cannot begin too early to teach our little ones to study and love them. While it is no longer possible for them to work in the garden the interest may be kept up by allowing them to help in the preparation of the floral gifts. And some excellent ideas are sometimes suggested by the original little minds. After noticing the mother arrange one of the winter-blooming hanging-baskets last fall a little florist of five years proceeded to arrange his own basket by filling one of his old hats with dirt and some plants from his own little flower bed; ribbon strings were then tied to the brim and he proudly displayed his hanging-basket beside the one arranged by the mother. Of course a reproof was necessary for using the hat for such a purpose, but the idea was a good one, and as the hat was old it was properly arranged with moss covering the inside, the soil and plants were replaced with a few nasturtiums planted near the edge to droop over, and by Christmas Day it was quite as pretty as any basket in the conservatory. Other arrangements of common plants will interest the children, and when well started will make acceptable Christmas "cards" because of their oddity. A large carrot or turnip may have the top removed and the inside hollowed out. Then fill it with water and hang it in a sunny window, and the leaves will soon start and form a charming little hanging-basket. A round ball of soil and moss, wired firmly in place, may have tradescantia stuck through the wire and trained, and it will soon form a beautiful large ball of glossy variegated leaves, if kept properly trimmed. It should be kept quite moist, and when suspended in the bay window by a fine wire it will prove a great attraction. A friend had a "sham" open fireplace in her parlor which was always an annoyance, as the room was heated from the register in the wall, and she did not "believe in shams," and had always longed for a "real" open fire. In planning her Christmas I endeavored to make this sham more attractive, and had two logs to fit it hollowed out and drainage arranged. Early in December the logs were filled with rich potting soil and several nasturtium plants, transplanted from the conservatory. They were soon rooted, and were covered with blooms when presented. When set in place the bright red and yellow blossoms made quite an acceptable flame. Of course it was necessary to keep the logs in the sunny window the greater part of the time, but on all special occasions, when it was desirable to have the parlor in "company trim," the flaming nasturtiums received their full share of admiration.

### WORTH CONSIDERING

**W**E read of a traveler who said: "I couldn't help contrasting the windows of the poorer class in London (sometimes the father of a family getting only four dollars a week in wages) with the same class in New York (where the breadwinner gets twelve or fifteen dollars a week). The first usually cultivated flowers in window boxes, and whole streets were made to look inviting and pretty from these alone, whereas in New York a general shiffliness and lack of beauty made it painful to walk through the poorer quarters of the city." But many of the well-to-do in our large cities are paying more attention to window gardening, and perhaps with encouragement the poorer classes will turn their attention to it. Let us be liberal with our plants and seeds at Christmas-time, for we know that a flower will often go into some miserable place where a tract or a word of advice, or kindly proffered aid will be thrown back with a curse. We are all familiar with the story of how a sturdy-blooming geranium presented to a poor family proved itself a missionary. First it was necessary to wash the windows to give the plant the sunshine; the clean windows were such a contrast to the dirty floor that it was scrubbed, and soon the careless, untidy family became neat, painstaking and prosperous.

The study and care of plants will seldom interest, at first, the growing boy of the poorer classes; he usually seems to consider flowers quite beneath his notice. But a close acquaintance with the bright blossoms will soon lead to a love of them. The interest will be awakened gradually, and when it is once aroused, and the boy begins to study the plants and care for them, he will be comparatively safe from the temptations that prove so alluring to the idle boy; and there will be great hope for his future, no matter how indifferent and careless he may have been in the past.

### AMONG THE SINFUL AND SORROWING

**S**EVERAL dozen bouquets were recently sent to be distributed among the members of the Sunday-school at one of our reformatories. The superintendent said it was pleasant, yet sad, to see how eagerly the scholars would take them, examine each flower, compare them with others, recall scenes and events outside their prison walls, and then turn and ask: "Why do the ladies remember us?" It is possible for flowers to preach better sermons to the sinful than any human voice. We recall the account of the perfect white rose in the "Silver Cross." It was left in the cell of a woman, "whose language," said the jailer, "is so wicked that it would scorch your ears to hear it." As the visitor turned from the cell she heard a heartrending cry of "mother, mother, mother." When she next went to the prison the jailer told her of a great change in the inmate, and of her desire to see the lady who brought the white rose. She told her story. The rose was just like those that grew at the door of her old home; it was her mother's favorite; it recalled her home, her parents, her sinful life and gave her a desire to do better. When the time came for her release she went out into the world to devote her life to the saving of just such fallen women as had been her past associates. Scatter the flowers among the sinful and sorrowing and they will carry the sermons, prayers or sympathies which we breathe among their petals.

### PLANTS FOR DESK AND OFFICE

**T**HERE are several gentlemen among my acquaintances," said a perplexed woman to me the other day, "for whom it seems almost impossible to select an appropriate Christmas gift. Will you help me to think of something new?" As each gentleman mentioned spends the greater part of his time in his office down town, of course I suggested flowers, and she soon became enthusiastic in making suitable selections. The atmosphere of the majority of offices is usually more congenial to plant life than the dry, hot, dusty air of our living-rooms. When the windows are shut off from the main room by sliding glass partitions the atmosphere is particularly good, as the temperature of the nook inclosed by glass is comparatively even and free from dust. Here the beautiful palms will flourish, and with proper care the one presented this Christmas will be quite as flourishing and much handsomer ten years from now, which cannot be said of much of the bric-à-brac selected to decorate the office. In these windows, too, the rare foliage plants which cannot stand dust or washing, will grow luxuriantly, but when presenting these plants grown for their foliage alone, be sure to include in the gift one or two blooming beauties, and while the palms, etc., which live and increase in beauty from year to year, come in time to seem like old friends, the capricious little bloomers that require some coaxing and petting will prove very interesting to the owner.

In choosing the plants for the office window it is necessary to first ascertain the degree of cold they will have to endure, and the amount of sunshine they will receive. Do not select roses, and other sun-loving plants, but primroses, begonias and others that flourish in the shade, for the windows where the awnings shut out the direct sunlight. For the offices where the temperature is apt to fall rather low on cold nights do not present the tender plants, but the winter-blooming bulbs, the carnations, the much-enduring geraniums, etc.

### PACKING CUT FLOWERS

**I**T is often desirable to send roses and other cut flowers through the mail at Christmas-time. A few hints in regard to careful packing are all that is necessary to understand, in order that they may be sent for long distances and be received almost as fresh as when first cut. Light wooden boxes from three to five inches deep, such as are received from the florist with mailing sized plants, are much better for packing the cut flowers than pasteboard boxes. With the least rough handling, especially if they are in a damp condition, the latter may become crushed and the flowers spoiled. Having selected a suitable box place a layer of sheet wadding in the bottom, seeing that the corners are nicely fitted, and over this place waxed paper. Allow the flowers to stand in water for some time before packing, and when the stems have taken up all the water that is possible lay them in smooth, even rows on the waxed paper. Let the stems of the upper row meet the blossoms of the lower, and continue packing close until the box is full. Then lay another piece of waxed paper over the top with a layer of the sheet wadding next to the lid. It is of the greatest importance to have the box packed full. If the flowers do not quite fill it, see that the spaces are filled with the wadding. If roses are to be sent do not select the full-blown ones, but firm, half-opened buds. It will not be necessary to sprinkle them with water if the stems have absorbed a quantity of moisture; being covered closely from the air they will not wilt as they would if exposed, and too much moisture may cause them to mildew and decay before reaching their destination.