

DIGGING FLOWER-BORDERS IN WINTER.



O me it appears a great mistake to dig either before Christmas, or for some weeks after, those borders that contain mixed collections of flowering bulbs and plants; and yet this is commonly done, because certain traditional rules must be observed, and are continually being enforced in some of our garden calendars. These calendars say, "All borders must be dug before Christmas, previous to frost setting in, so that the earth may be benefited." I am not a disciple of this mode of teaching, for on all possible occasions do I evade it, though employers are often very urgent for its adoption, as a matter of neatness and order; and so far they are right. But I can with the hoe and rake comply with this wish without disturbing the soil either with the spade or fork until the period I consider it desirable. Now, I argue that from the middle of February to the middle of March is the most suitable time for digging or forking the border. My reason may be briefly stated. If you begin and finish the operation in the autumn, you must, in the act of digging, unless they are specially marked, disturb occasionally the clumps of bulbous roots and other plants whose crowns may not be visible. Such things as pæonies, delphiniums, day-lilies, etc., are very likely to suffer. Many of those plants that are partly hidden by leaves and earth are injured at the roots, if their crowns are not damaged. I contend, also, by disturbing the soil to the depth it is done, that the late autumn rains are allowed to penetrate more freely, and thus the earth to a certain extent is deprived of its natural heat, and, should frost set in, its severity will be felt quicker by those plants whose roots have been so far exposed by the digging. If the decayed stalks of plants and other rubbish are removed, and the ground somewhat levelled with the rake in the autumn, and otherwise made to look neat, that will suffice to the period for digging which I have recommended. It must not be forgotten that in some winters the earth, for several weeks, is more or less hidden by a covering of snow.

But the main object of my recommendation is this: I believe that we shall the better preserve many of our dwarfest herbaceous plants whose roots travel but a few inches below the surface, and from whence are issued their future flowering shoots. Besides this, we are, by the postponement of the digging to the dawn of spring, enabled to ascertain the exact spot where the bulbs and other hitherto dormant roots are planted. We can then avoid destroying their rootlets; and if we are using manure, we can then judiciously supply it to the roots of those plants that most need it. Of course, if a re-arrangement of the plants in the border is necessary, then the autumn is the most advisable season for that operation. Late digging has also this advantage, that where you sow annuals or transplant them in a small state, the early weeds are not so apt to get in advance of their growth, and in plying the Dutch hoe you can readily discern the plants from the weeds. Another benefit is

also realized by the late digging, and that is, the ground not being previously soaked by the heavy rain of winter, the warm but genial showers of spring have freer access to the roots, and thus increase the fertility of the soil.

HEAD GARDENER.

NOTES ON GLOXINIAS.

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GLOXINIAS are so similar to the Achimenes in their requirements, that in speaking of them it is not necessary to allude to the general details, for a reference to the paper on the last-mentioned flowers, which appeared in the February number, will furnish the desired information. The manner of increasing Gloxinias is very different, and for the information of those who are fond of propagating plants and have the proper convenience, I will offer a few hints on the subject.

In the first place it must be stated that there are two ways of increasing Gloxinias, one by seed and the other by cuttings of the leaves, and also that to be successful the aid of a hotbed or stove will be required. Nothing better than a cucumber or melon frame, or an early vinery, could be desired, and wherever there is one of these structures there also may these flowers be propagated *ad libitum*, and grown to a state bordering on perfection. Perhaps the best course for a young beginner to pursue would be to purchase shortly a dozen or so of small corms, of the best of the cheap kinds, and then save his own seeds. The next best plan will be to buy a packet of seed from a reliable seedsman, and sow it as I shall advise, with as little delay as possible. There is but little danger of being supplied with seed saved from inferior flowers, for the simple reason that few varieties, excepting those which are really first-class, are to be met with in either trade or private collections. It must, of course, be understood that the Gloxinia does not reproduce itself true from seed, and even where the greatest care is taken in the matter, a very considerable number will not be equal to the best of those from which it has been saved. At the same time it is quite possible that some of the seedlings will surpass their parents, and it is certain that all will be sufficiently attractive to be of considerable value for decorative purposes.

Having procured the seed, prepare a sufficient number of pots, by filling them first to about half their depth with crocks, and the remaining space with a mixture of peat, leaf-mould, and sand, broken up very small and the rough portions removed. The soil must be made fine to admit of the seedlings being transplanted without receiving any considerable amount of injury. Make the surface level with a piece of board or the bottom of a flower-pot, scatter the seeds thinly and regularly over it, and cover with a sprinkle of silver sand. It is not desirable to apply water immediately after the seed