

THE VALUE OF GLASS IN THE CULTIVATION OF FRUIT.



HE mischievous effects on the fruit crop of the frost of May 19-20 afford another important lesson on the value of glass in the production of home-grown fruit. We have several times directed the attention of our readers to the immense value of glass, and have, from time to time, presented illustrations of temporary and other coverings, designed for the protection of wall-trees, for the purpose of affording them all the help we can. We now return to the subject, and trust that the arguments advanced in favour of the more extended employment of glass in fruit culture will have fair consideration.

At the onset, we would observe that the cultivation of fruit in this country is not in quite so deplorable a state as to demand a revolution as the alternative of its entire abandonment. Our exhibitions keep us constantly reminded, that in all parts of the country the best fruits are skilfully treated and thoroughly appreciated, and, generally speaking, we believe sufficient is produced for our own consumption, though our markets are largely supplied with foreign produce. Communications with the Continent are now so rapid and certain, and the cost of freighting is, comparatively speaking, so small, that the foreigner, employing labour at a cheaper rate than rules here, renting land at less than English averages, and with a more intense and continuous flood of sunshine gratis, can compete with our own growers advantageously, and is likely, therefore, to a great extent, to keep command of our markets in respect of certain classes of produce. Nevertheless, English-grown fruit is by no means at a discount. First-class English grapes, which surpass in quality all other grapes, no matter where in the world they are produced, realize prices that are calculated to encourage home cultivation of this best of fruits. As to the general management of fruit gardens, our practice is not quite antiquated, and perhaps a little of what might by some be called retrogression would be for our benefit. As to peaches and wall-trees generally, we see them in good gardens superbly managed, and on the fan-shaped system of training and its few modifications, the trees are, in a majority of instances, in perfect health, and in favourable seasons, abundantly fruitful. We have two special enemies to contend with—the late frosts that destroy the embryo fruit or nip the blossom in the bud, and the dull, damp weather commonly prevailing in autumn, which interferes materially with the perfect ripening of the wood. *The antidote to these two evils is to be found in the more general employment of glass.* First-rate grapes and peaches can only be obtained, except in highly-favoured districts, with the aid of some kind of shelter, whether in the form of a glass-covered wall, a spacious and well-fitted house, or the more humble but highly useful “ground vinery.” It is quite certain that the judicious use of glass in fruit culture will always quickly repay its cost, both in the greater certainty and quantity as well as in the superior

quality of the produce. We save thereby the tender crop from destruction by frost and wet when the trees are in bloom, we obtain increased heat for the ripening of the fruit, and the growth of the season is more perfectly matured. No one expects a dish of Black Hamburgh grapes or Walburton Admirable peaches worth a place on a good table without the help of glass. Even strawberries, the hardiest of our choice fruits, and lovers of the fresh air, are the better for the shelter of glass in a cold season.

But we can scarcely help saying that, in many instances, and with, of course, the best intentions, glass has been abused. The orchard-house, with its potted trees, is a charming affair when well managed, and the trees will give as much fruit as would fill the pots they are grown in; but it is a manifest delusion to suppose that the produce is ever equivalent to the actual value of the labour expended in securing it. If skill and labour have to be paid for at average rates, potted trees make too much work for the return they give, and we go back to the old and sound system of planting out in borders as the one to be trusted for profitable ends. In the first instance, fewer trees are required, at every step there is less work, and the trees, having more vigour of growth, are less infested with vermin, less tortured by disease, and the crop puts to shame that of the best collection of potted trees occupying a similar extent of glass. A well-shaped and freely-fruited pot-tree is a beautiful object, of which its possessor may well be proud; but the man who keeps a ledger, and desires fruit at no higher price than its actual cost in outlay and labour, will be cautious how he deals with these pretty toys, and will prefer to accommodate Nature rather than engage in a constant warfare with her. All restrictions of the head and root, no matter what the subject may be, is a form of warfare; and in the case of fruit trees, restriction must increase the cares of the cultivator, and lessen the chances of success.

But restriction is not alone practised in the cultivation of fruit-trees in pots. We see it everywhere in operation as the orthodox method of cultivating the grape-vine, and the complaints of shanking, bad colouring, and other ailments, which reach horticultural advisers in extravagant abundance, invariably occur in connection with restricted vines. The great vines, which have a large house devoted to them, are never in need of doctors; they spread abroad as Nature designed the vine to spread, and though subjected to artificial treatment, and rooted in a soil many degrees colder than the vine is accustomed to in its native habitats, their vigour is ever in excess of the influences tending to their injury, and a state of health and productiveness is normal to them.

What is true of the grape-vine is true of other trees. As in the case of potted trees and single-rod vines, single-cordon and bush apple and pear-trees, are useful things. They grow very little, and produce, in comparison with the space they occupy, very fair supplies of good fruit. But if our supplies of home-grown fruit are defective, these miniature trees will not supply the deficiency. They belong to the land of toys, and their advocacy as profitable fruit-producers has been overdone. Let us hope, however, that healthy trees ou

free stocks—trees possessed of vigour and long-lasting properties—will be looked to for profitable results rather than such as are chiefly interesting because of the excessive trouble they occasion, and their general adaptiveness for planting in the front of a doll's house. S. H.

HUNTING FOR BEDDING PLANTS.

BY JOHN WALSH.



OME bedding plants are so much affected by peculiarities of soil and situation, that it is essential to see them abroad as well as at home, before pronouncing a decided opinion on their merits. So strongly am I convinced of the importance of this, that I annually make a tour of the public parks, in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, where the bedding arrangements are on a large scale, and also of those nurseries in which the bedders form an important part of the trade. By doing this, and comparing the notes made in my rambles with those made in my own garden, I am well able to speak with confidence of the value of novelties, or the adaptability of old favourites for special purposes.

Before passing on to an enumeration of the most desirable bedders for propagating in quantities for next year's display, I would strongly advise those who have not done so, and are interested in floricultural pursuits, to visit the London parks with as little delay as possible. The parks in which the bedding arrangements are on an extensive scale, and in the best possible taste, are Hyde, Victoria, and Battersea, and they are here placed in somewhat of a proper order of merit. The bedding display in the first-mentioned park is really grand; the series of beds extending by the side of Park Lane, from the Marble Arch to Hyde Park Corner, are simply grand, and afford the best possible example of the manner in which flower-beds should be kept during the summer season. They are not only filled with a due regard to the artistic blending of the colours, and quite solid with bloom, or, as the case may be, most richly coloured with leaf plants, but they are most tastefully kept, not a leaf nor a flower being out of its proper place, or a dead leaf or unsightly flower-truss perceptible anywhere. It occasions no small amount of work to keep the beds in the same perfect order as these, but on the principle of "What is worth doing, is worth doing well," the beds should either have the necessary attention, or be turfed over and blotted out of existence.

The planting in front of the ivy-covered house, not far from the bridge by which the Serpentine is crossed, is extremely rich, as also is the bedding in front of Kensington Palace.

The bedding in Victoria Park is also extremely good, the principal points of interest being near Shore Place, Shore Gate, and by the side of the lake, and by the side of the road running from the Crown to the Royal Hotels.