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Tips on Gardening

By Betty Frankel

SWEET PEAS—Have sweet peas gone out of style? These sweet scented, colorful flowers were once the favorite of both gardeners and florists but are seen infrequently now despite the improved forms that are available.

The sweet pea is a close relative of the garden green pea. It is a native of southern Italy from which it was introduced into European gardens around 1700. The flowers of the wild type are purple and it was not until 1870 when Henry Eckford, an English florist, began his breeding program that the wide range of beautiful colors appeared. He improved flower size and proportion, too, and was responsible for a tremendous increase in the popularity of the sweet pea.

The Eckford varieties were introduced into America around 1886 and it was soon found that California had a superior climate for growing sweet peas. The seed industry is located there and several new types have been developed there including a non-climbing bush type and the Cuthbertson heat-resistant strains which are the best type to grow in the Mid-West.

In this area sweet peas should be planted as early in Spring as the ground can be worked, or they can be started indoors in pots in January and set out in early Spring. Sweet peas need a sunny location.

but do not plant them on the hot side of a building. They do best in deep, rich soil well supplied with organic material, but too much nitrogen will cause excessive vine growth and fewer flowers. Mulching is beneficial to conserve moisture.

Customarily when planting the seeds a narrow trench six inches deep is dug. The seeds are placed at the bottom of this and covered with an inch or two of soil. As the plants grow more soil is filled in around the seed. It is an inch from the top, a depression being left to collect moisture. Wire, brush, or strings must be supplied for the vines to climb on. If faded flowers are removed bloom continues over a long period of time, especially with the late-flowering varieties.

The bush types require no support and can be grown in beds, borders, and even window boxes. The plants grow only twelve inches tall but produce many flowers on six-inch stems. They make excellent cut flowers.

In addition to the annual sweet pea, biennial clematis as *Lathyrus odoratus*, there is a perennial sweet pea, *Lathyrus latifolius*, that has large showy pink, purple or white flowers borne throughout the summer. It is a rather rank-growing vine but is excellent for clothing a steep bank or to grow in a semi-wild garden at a vacation home.

REMEMBERS: Cut roses early in the day. Cut back to an outward facing bud and leave at least two leaves on the stem below the cut. . . Continue a regular spray program to keep roses healthy and blooming. . . Prune shrubs that have finished blooming. Do not just shear off the tops, but remove old branches at ground level. . . Foliage of Spring bulbs is ripe and can be removed by giving a gentle tug. Bare spots can be filled in by planting seeds of quick growing annuals such as poppies, phlox, or African daisies. . .

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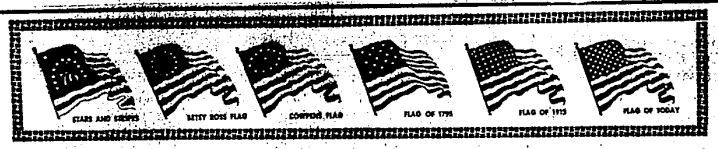
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