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SEX APPEAL, TOO

Mr. Middleton

Has Everything

E knew that Mr. Middleton had a wonderful radio voice, and that he combined with it a wonderful knowledge of gardening and a wonderful flair for putting his knowledge over the air; but we did not know until the latest issue of an English radio magazine arrived that he also had sex appeal.

There is material for a limerick about a young lady of Chester. She confesses to getting "delightful little frizzles" down her spine when the quiet voice of the BBC's gardening expert is broadcast.

But perhaps her spine has settled down to normality now that C. H. Middleton is working for the BBC's Television Department. He has a round friendly face, wears spectacles, and a flower in his buttonhole.

The BBC has its own private garden, as wonderful in its way as Middleton is in his.

It is here that the First Gardener in England likes best of all to conduct his television sessions. Diagonal paths divide the garden into four, so that a television camera in the middle can give lookers what appears to be a choice of four different gardens. Each is quite different, and each undergoes incessant change, for Middleton is always experimenting and searching for new radio material.

Lately, for instance, the garden has seen solemn conclaves of experts discussing Middleton's latest ideas about fruit tree pruning. He believes that many trees and shrubs would be better left to grow naturally; that there is far too much inexpert pruning. But he likes the idea of "half-pruning." He suggests, when growth is active in the English August, that ends should be cut off all the young side shoots, or "laterals." In winter, he plans to cut off the remainder, leaving only a stump with one or two buds or leaf scars on it.

By then the piece left after the first cut will have grown a small new shoot, out from just below the summer cut.

The idea is that the cut in summer causes a sudden check while the sap is still rising actively. The bud nearest the cut is forced into a new shoot, while the sap gathers in the lower buds, tending to convert them from "wood" buds into "fruit" buds.

He shows lookers how such experiments as this are progressing, and tells listeners about them so attractively they see them almost as clearly as the television screen pictures them.

The 40-yard plot is only 200 yards from the television studios. Strange, that rural England should be so interested in a garden close to the heart of London!