

GARDENING NOTES

(By Mr. J. JOYCE, Landscape Gardener, Christchurch.)

I am pleased to see that the Christchurch correspondent of the *Tablet* appreciates my garden notes, and acknowledges my humble efforts to give a little information to lovers of horticulture who have had no chance or opportunity to gain sufficient knowledge to carry out their ideas in connection with the beautifying of their homes and surroundings. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to impart information to all lovers of horticulture, who are anxious to indulge in that pursuit. If my humble efforts will benefit one individual, and that I know he appreciates my intentions to encourage him to develop his taste and skill, I shall feel amply repaid for the time I spend in writing my garden notes for the *Tablet*. Whilst on this subject, I might say that I have written many articles on gardening matters for other papers in the past, and I have had several letters from readers thanking me for the information imparted, thus showing that my work in this direction had been appreciated. Then, on the other hand, I have many friends who cannot understand why I should give my experience of so many years to the public—an experience which cost me money, time, and thought. Well, my answer to those people is that I have been amply repaid if my information benefited one inquiring mind, and that he was grateful to me for my efforts to enlighten him.

FERNS AND MOSSES.

I have been wandering away from the subject which I intended to write about—ferns and mosses. To grow ferns and mosses to perfection they must have a nice cool, moist atmosphere, with perfect security from the bright sun and cold cutting winds. The best way to secure this is to build a suitable place for their cultivation. There is nothing in the garden gives more pleasure and satisfaction for the time spent on it than a well-built fernery. Everything looks so nice, cool, and refreshing in it that no one will begrudge the time it takes to give the plants a little water once or twice a day, and that is nearly all they require once they are established. When circumstances permit, the fernery should be a fairly roomy structure, and a good height, so as to allow plenty of space for the growth of tree ferns. Breadth and length should not be curtailed, so that there may be plenty of room to get about and attend to the requirements of the plants. If the building is of timber, it must be lined inside with sheets of iron to preserve the wood, as mounds of soil will have to be built against the walls, and if the iron protection is not there the wood would soon rot. As a beginning we will suppose the building is completed, and the inside is lined with iron. The roof should be of alternate rows of iron and glass. Start with two sheets of iron to run up to the top ridge from the eaves, then about three feet wide of glass, let in sash-bars, also running to the top. Then rows of iron and glass alternately to the finish. The other side is to be done in the same manner, but the glass in this case must face the iron on the opposite side, so as to distribute the light evenly. The glass must be frosted over lightly so as to prevent the bright rays of the sun from scorching the fronds of the ferns. Now, the next part of the programme is to mix up a good quantity of mould, comprising, if possible, a fair amount of good soil from a paddock, also an equal amount of peat, leaf mould, and sand. The soil is not to be too heavy or stiff, and must have a good mixture of sharp sand to keep it open and porous, as the constant watering would sodden it if it was too heavy. In the next place the inside plan is to be thought out, and a large quantity of rough soil and material, such as rough stones, gravel, or rubble, is made up into hills and hollows, according to the design to be carried out. Then mark out the intended walk, by laying on stones along the edge. Now the building of the miniature mountains, hills, etc., commences; also a waterfall, if water is procurable for the purpose. The best position for the waterfall would be from the top of the gable opposite to the doorway. The water can be

supplied from a tank placed at a proper elevation. This must be built with stone and cement, allowing little basins for the water to drop into. When these basins are full the water flows over the ledge, down to another ledge, and so on to the bottom, finally to a pond or grotto. If water is not too plentiful it could be manipulated by means of a tap placed near the entrance door, so that it could be conveniently turned on, if required, when entering, and turned off on leaving. The design must be carried out with good, rough stone, and the prepared soil filled in as the work proceeds. On no account should roots or wood of any sort be used to form the mounds, as the wood soon rots and creates a fungus which will not add to the health of the ferns. It would be out of place to give any idea as to the form of the design, as the position and outline must be left to the taste and skill of the constructor. But to erect a good fernery on a large scale it needs the experienced hands and skill of a capable workman to carry it out satisfactorily. To build a fernery nature must be imitated, and sometimes improved on, for nature does not always beautify its designs to suit the individual taste, so that the owner has to alter nature's handiwork in accordance with his ideas and requirements. But it is only on a very small scale that man can improve on nature's designs, such as in this case, when he wants to imitate a miniature mountain and erect it in an enclosed structure in the form of a fernery. The next thing to do is to furnish the building with many specimens from forest, mountain, and glen, some of the choicest species of ferns, mosses, and other suitable plants, such as the noble tree ferns, which have a canopy of foliage resembling an umbrella. When well grown these tree ferns are most beautiful. They must be always kept moist and cool, and grown in a shady place if we want them to come to perfection. The different mosses or lycopodiums are a very interesting species of plants for the fernery. There is a great variety of ferns and mosses to be found throughout New Zealand, quite sufficient to form a good collection. There is also a great variety of English ferns which can be procured from the nurseries here, especially a number of the *Adiantum*, or maiden hair kind. A good collection of *Adiantums* is a treat to look at. There is such a variety of ferns that it is not necessary to give a list here, but an admirer of any specialty can always find out the name by applying to a nurseryman who deals in such. The silver tree fern (*Cyathea dealbata*) looks very effective, with its beautiful silvery fronds showing from underneath the foliage. Then the large black tree fern (*Cyathea medullaris*), with its immense length of fronds, is really a splendid plant when seen in its perfect state. The fault is that it soon gets too big when grown inside, unless the building happens to be very large. Another species of the tree fern is the *Dicksonia antarctica*, and *Dicksonia squarrosa*, more commonly seen about the outskirts of the bush, which makes a very pretty addition to the fernery. Then we have many other varieties of ferns, and dozens of the maiden hair species (*Adiantum*), and the beautiful Prince of Wales plumes, called *Todea superba*, and *Todea hymenophylloides*.

Ferns are a peculiar class of plants. They have no gay colors; they produce no flowers, and always wear a sombre green appearance. They produce leaves called fronds, never any branches. Those fronds have brown scales underneath the foliage, and in those scales the seed, called spores, is produced. As the fern does not produce any gay flowers, we must look for its beauty in the arrangement of the spore cells so neatly placed underneath the leaves, which causes them to be so much admired as general favorites. Ferns belong to the lower group of vegetation. They are propagated by seed or spores and by division, and some bear young plants on the leaves like little bulbs. One fern in particular, which is fairly common, on that account is named *Pteris bulbiferum*.

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