

Chapter 13

The Future

Only wise men and politicians dare to predict the course of the future and even then usually in more ambiguous words than the priestess of Delphos. However, we have only to look at present achievements and trends to feel confidence in firm progress being continued in the bulb and bulb flower industry.

We now have an industry which is efficient, mechanised and organised to respond to the market requirements of today and to adapt to change. Fifty years of experience and scientific research are paying dividends in the form of better bulbs and flowers in both quality and quantity. The direct beneficiary of improvements is the customer who is not only paying less in real terms for what used to be fairly expensive luxuries for the home and garden, but also is able to rely on more consistent quality. Standards of quality control are very high now and under commercial pressure will go even higher, except perhaps in the bargain basement.

The U.K. is established as a major world producer of narcissus. Using our climatic advantages to the full, this position will be consolidated and expanded. Exports to the continent will be expanded and inroads made into many other countries. The sheer golden joy of the yellow trumpets as a harbinger of spring will maintain the weight of yellow varieties in the volume of production. Yet already there are in the pipeline from breeders, daffodil varieties in shades of pink and apricot and forms resembling cyclamen, camellia, and orchid flowers to tempt the enthusiast.

The production of tulips has diminished over recent years to a level in line with consumption. This has levelled off and should stabilise at the current acreage unless the serious over-production in the Netherlands continues to depress trade prices all over the world. The consumption of forced tulips in winter has declined and this winter crop cannot be produced cheaply since a lot of expensive heating is required and the bulbs used are a major cost because they are of no further use after

forcing. However, a certain quantity will be required for this purpose to provide variety and the trade for gardening will remain firm as nothing can challenge the tulip during April and May for spectacular display.

The production of types of bulbs has tended to concentrate into specialisation. Cut flower producers aim for a wide range of varieties and types to spread the harvesting and marketing period. Bulb growers on the other hand have already begun to concentrate on a few varieties of one type to which they can apply detailed management.

Happily there are still a few specialists who will enjoy growing the more unusual species and devote their expertise to the challenge of garden species and the demanding lilies and amaryllis.

A great deal of expertise has developed in the Netherlands in the use of their sand lands for the production of hyacinths, minor bulbs, crocus, iris and tulips for special use in the garden trade and for forcing in Scandinavia. This position is unlikely to be assailed though a few English growers will make an attempt for a share of that market.

The developing countries are unlikely to move into bulb production because their climates are unsuitable. The dark horses in the next decade are perhaps the Japanese who have the potential, the New Zealanders who have the interest and the Israelis who have developed tremendous technical capability. The first two would have great marketing and shipping problems to overcome but the Israelis have shown their ability by meristem culturing new clean stocks of Paper White, putting them into field production in a short space of time and merchandising them ahead of the world.

The general interest in the environment in which we live is a relatively new manifestation in both the depth of feeling and the widespread support at all levels of society. If we disregard the more extreme partisan attitudes of the more rabid ecologists and conservationists, we are, as a nation, becoming more aware of our surroundings. The concept of the garden city, the relaxing atmosphere of green plants in office and home and the responsibility of the planner and architect in creating a landscape, have all become accepted policies.

The incorporation of living plants and trees into every situation from the house to the motorway or decayed urban centre is one of the few aesthetic improvements achieved in this century and will increase. The place of bulbs in environmental planting is a special one. In terms of cost they are relatively cheap and easy to establish. Landscape designers calculate the cost per square metre of a daffodil planting as no more than the cost of a properly prepared and protected sowing of grasses.

In impact they are much more spectacular, especially at a time of year when the feel of spring is in the air, but the trees and shrubs have not yet

woken into leaf. Wonders can be achieved in open vistas or motorway banks where bulbs thrive happily in companionship with deciduous trees and bushes. Vandalism need not be a problem as the city of Aberdeen has found with the glorious swathes of golden daffodils brightening the hillsides in the granite city.

The greater use of growing plants and flowers in the home has been one of the most spectacular increases over the last decade. There is room for even greater increase in the coming years now that everyone realises there is no need for the services of the special conservatory attached to the great house for the enjoyment of gracious living. Bulbs as pot plants add to the variety available and provide a chapter of interest as the buds emerge, lengthen and finally bloom against the more static background foliage plants. Not only have we sturdy varieties of hyacinth, tulip, daffodil and iris reticulata to offer now, but the introduction of chemical growth inhibitors is making the use of many less expensive varieties possible.

Much is written of the stresses of modern life and the greater incidence of mental illness in the twentieth century. These stresses are probably no greater than the stresses of cold, deprivation and disease of earlier eras and certainly existed before Freud though they were not so carefully defined and to us the stresses of today are more real for being so close.

Experts in these fields can recommend colours which influence people's behaviour; yellows are brightening, greens are restful and so on. In the same way plants and flowers can have a therapeutic effect in the fact that persons who tend growing plants (or living creatures) can relate to a world of natural evolution of unchanging values to restore the balance in the daily pressures.

Urban man is rebelling against his concrete jungle and the experiment of the high rise community turns back again to the "garden city" concept.

Among the many material benefits we enjoy in this century, the one most universally enjoyed is increased leisure time. This new freedom is one which many people are ill equipped to put to good use. There are indications that manufactured entertainment and vicarious pleasure pall after a while. It is a good thing that more and more people are devoting part of that leisure to gardening and find it satisfying. The leisure market is the fastest expanding sector in sales today and gardening is taking a growing share of the market.

Fortunately, bulbs and bulb flowers are available in every category to suit enthusiast or connoisseur and will continue to be relatively cheap and of good value. For every gardener his spring showing is an important occasion, showing his skill and setting his standards for the rest of the



Loading Bulbs for Export

Photo: Lingarden Ltd.

year. For him his bulbs will always be rewarding and a reliable means of achieving an excellent spring show.

What greater sense of satisfaction can there be than in having produced by oneself those darling buds of May.