

British Floral Industry

by

W. D. Holley

Britain produces and uses far more flowers per capita than America. Total area under glass is beyond the thinking of Americans, however tomatoes, cucumbers and mushrooms occupy much of the

growing structures. It is not uncommon to find ranges of 10 or more acres in tomatoes or cucs. Many of the large vegetable forcing operations are near marginal because of lack of labor. Labor

is poorly paid hence difficult to keep in greenhouse jobs. Some Italian workers have been imported in recent years. The effects of the EEC treaty or European Common Market on flower and vegetable growers in the several countries remains to be seen.

to a lot of flowers, most of which seem to find their way through the Covent Garden Market in London. On top of all this, imported flowers from other sections of Europe are likely to increase with the European Common Market.

Research Station

England has a number of regional research stations working for the glasshouse industry. The lion's share of work seems to be on tomatoes and cucumbers, although flower crops are getting increasing attention. I visited the Sussex Glasshouse Institute which has a fine program under way under the direction of Dr. F. W. Toovey. This is a relatively new station located in one of the highest winter light areas of England. Considerable glass is being moved to this south coastal area from near London. Plant Protection Ltd.'s research station at Fernhurst is doing a great deal for horticulture. Their applied research and service work are practical and highly regarded in the florist trade.

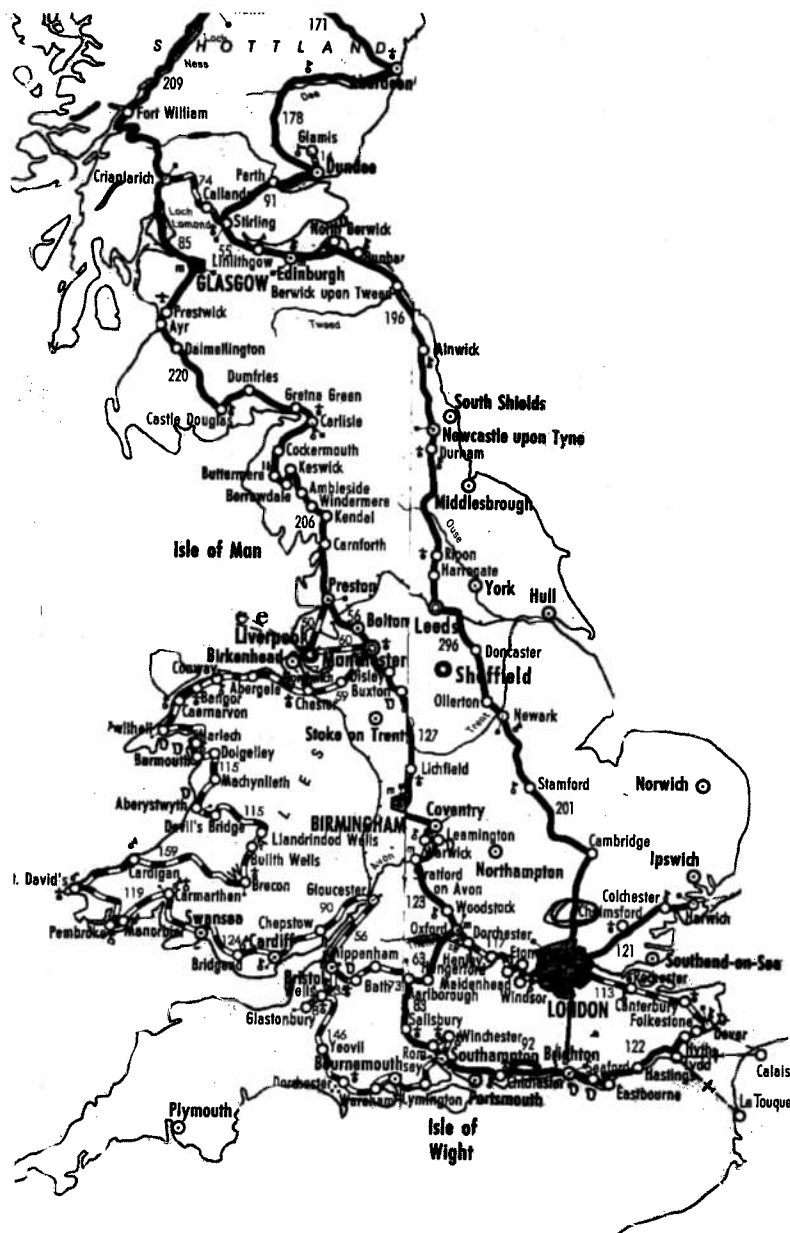
South coast...

Two large firms on the South Coast are producing disease free chrysanthemum and carnation cuttings. Both Framptons and Sparkes have developed this type of business and are producing planting stock on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean. These two firms have done much to popularize the American pompon varieties and year around chrysanthemum growing in England. English chrysanthemum growers have a serious problem with blindness even on unpinched plants which grow through the winter months. Lack of light and extremely short days are serious handicaps for British growers. As an example summer yield of chrysanthemum cuttings is about triple that of winter.

The glass area devoted to flower crops is concentrated principally in the Lea Valley just north and east of London, and in the counties of Southeast England. About 500 acres of glass are growing flowers (possibly 3 or 4 times as much is in vegetables). In addition, over 7000 acres of flowers are grown in the open with chrysanthemums being one of the leading crops. The more important areas for outdoor flower production are around Cambridge and north, around London and south, and Southwest England around Plymouth. This all adds up

The carnations seen in July at several firms were very good. Prices were low and yields heavy at this time. Outdoor temperatures seldom exceed 75 or 80°F, but there was plenty of evidence that fan and evaporative pad cooling was beneficial to carnation quality. A new house at Framptons with twice the top ventilation area also showed increased flower size and quality.

English prices for carnations seem to peak during the spring months and drop off rapidly after June 1. While fall prices



are usually better than those in summer, heavy competition from outdoor flowers and chrysanthemums depresses all prices somewhat. To hit the good spring markets, considerable planting is done in summer, even as late as the end of July and early August, for flowering in March and April. Since they have a highly fluctuating market, closer spacing at the right planting time is yielding favorable results. There are advocates of 4 and even 5 cuttings per square foot for a heavier first crop on a high market.

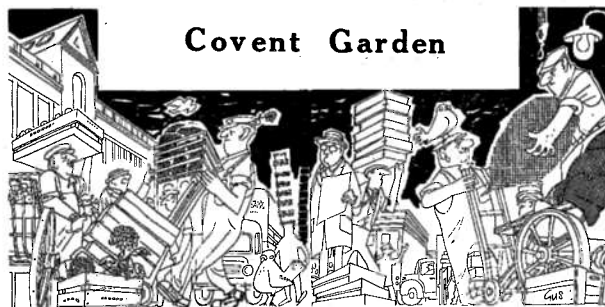
The Lea Valley

My hosts in the Lea Valley, just north of London, were the Pollard family. Stuart Pollard is the third generation to run this empire of glass which extends to possibly 60 acres when the place at Henlow is included. While tomatoes and cucs are their main crops in terms of area (not profit), they grow fine roses and carnations. They are the largest growers in England of the new rose variety Baccara. They have found this rose to be a better producer than Happiness, but it does produce 2 percent or more crook-necks. This seems to be an inherent weakness of the variety. As soon as young growths indicate the crooked-neck condition, they pinch them off high. The problem does not seem associated with cane vigor or time of year. There are few, if any, disbuds on stems that are crippled. Pollards grow roses directly in the ground, on canina understocks, and have found that Baccara likes good drainage and lots of water. They also like Pink Sensation, a sport of Delight, and Montezuma, which opens very little after cutting. They had a small planting of the new Super Star rose which is a brilliant vermilion color. A firm comes from Holland with the understocks and grafts their new planting stock on the place during the winter.

Pollard's air conditioned carnations were as good as any seen in Europe and were bringing a 20% premium on the London market. Most of the pads seen in England were too dense thereby reducing cooling efficiency. The excelsior available locally is soft and ribbon-like and tends to pack down in the pads. Excellent locally obtained fans were in the Pollard installation. Apparently the value of cooling in England results from the even temperatures which can be maintained. On

cool days fans and pads only maintain outside temperature, however when a warm sunny day occurs, cooling keeps the temperature down to that of previous cool days.

E. G. Fouracres & Son is another excellent flower growing operation in the Lea Valley producing year around chrysanthemums and carnations. Their carnations were very fine without the aid of cooling.



A story on Britain would not be complete without Covent Garden. Most sizeable cities have central markets where agricultural produce is bought and sold. Some are modern and some are extremely overcrowded.

I have no figures on the percentage of British grown which move through the Covent Garden Market in London, but I marvel that they do so well with the crowded conditions prevailing. Every type of marketing is represented there with most of the flower sales made by commission men. Salesmen have stalls in the flower market proper, which is indeed a jumble at busy times. Adjacent to this area are other buildings in which the larger brokers handle flowers and plants shipped or brought in to them by the producers. To quote one grower "The chaos is more orderly in the commission houses."

Outside the Garden the streets are narrow and access in and out of the market is quite difficult. On occasions traffic jams last for hours. I believe most growers realize that Covent Garden is the worst bottleneck in the British Floral Industry. I didn't hear of any steps under way to remedy the situation.

Flowers are marketed for the most part in small packages. Carnations and

roses are often packed by the producer in 2, 3 or 4 dozen boxes. I saw some beautifully designed cardboard cartons of this size costing around 20 cents each. The extra cost of the cartons and labor of placing the flowers adds considerable to the cost of marketing. No liners are used in these boxes which have small air holes at either end. The pressure to keep this expensive method of packing seems to come mostly from the retail florist. There is no doubt that flowers travel better in this package, but at a rather high cost per bloom.

*Your editor,
W.D. Holley*

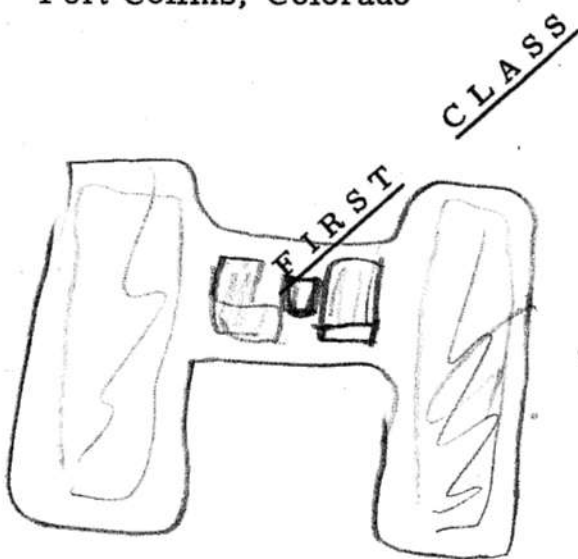
**HYDRANGEA TIMING SCHEDULE
EASTER - APRIL 2, 1961**

Date	Days to Easter	Suggested status of development
Dec 26	98	Dormant raise temperature 50°
Jan 5	88	Leaves beginning to open 55°
Jan 8	85	2-4 leaves showing 60°
Jan 14	79	6 leaves showing
Jan 20	73	8-10 leaves showing
Jan 25	68	Flower cluster-just showing
Jan 31	62	Flower cluster- size of dime
Feb 6	55	Flower cluster-size of cent
Feb 12	49	Flower cluster-size of nickel
Feb 19	42	Flower cluster-size of quarter
Feb 25	36	Flower cluster-size of half dollar
March 2	31	Flower cluster-size of silver dollar
March 6	27	Bracts developed
March 9	24	Bracts developed and coloring
March 14	19	Bracts coloring
March 19	14	Bracts coloring and hardened
March 26	7	Plants hardened - cool
April 2	0	Easter

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G. Rutt

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March 1*