

Carnations in Persian "Gardens"

Lennard Håkansson

Old Persia or modern Iran is known for famous carpets and huge oil supplies. Very little is known about their flower industry—so far very little influenced by modern growing technique. The author was very happy to find carnations being the most important cut flower grown—but in pots.

When you first land at Mehrabad Airport near Teheran, which is located on an altitude of 3,800 feet, you soon find many things reminding you of Denver, Colorado. The sun, the thin dry air, the scenic mountain view, even the wide streets of Denver. Returning to the carnation growing, the only thing that makes you think of Colorado is the excellent quality in some "gardens".

So turn your watch back about 50-100 years and it is like a dream. There are about 130 "gardens" in Teheran within the city limits, in size from 20,000 to 400,000 sq.



And what about the carnations? They are grown by the hundred thousands in 12" clay pots on terraces under huge lean-to glasshouses with small iron T-bars. The houses are definitely not leakproof, but it rains very seldom. Small ventilating windows are spotted on the roof and operated separately by hand. Sash ventilators are large and are also used as doors. Plants are watered by watercan or syringe. The soil mixture for the pots is made with great skill and includes gravel, sand, clay, leaf and manure compost. No steaming is practiced. Self-propagating is a rule and is done in a greenhouse during November-January. After 4-5 weeks they are potted in 3" clay pots and after another month in 6". They are grown in the final 12" clay pots for about two years. Feeding is done by guess and "complete" dry fertilizer is applied. With the exception of rust and botrytis problems, the "gardeners" are not plagued by severe diseases. There is strong competition between the gardeners and quite a difference in quality from garden to garden. "Cleaning" of the plants, which includes disbudding, tying, removing of rust and wilted leaves plus harvesting of a few cuttings for self-propagating, takes place twice a month and the pots are moved a few feet. The walks are too narrow for doing this job. The upper or backward terrace is often used

feet ground area, averaging about 50,000 sq. feet. Every garden is protected by an 8-12 feet high solid brick wall. Narrow, muddy streets are dividing and connecting the gardens. The gates are painted in gay colours, mostly blue. The strong smell of horse manure mixes with similar odors from rotting composts. For a European it is impossible to find the way as everything is written in artistic Arabian letters. You need a good local guide and a four wheel drive car in order to visit these plantings.

Inside a garden the atmosphere is inexplicable, peaceful and colourful. Even around December 1, when I visited Iran, lots of pansies, calendula and geraniums were in full blossom like a living Persian carpet. Men are working with primitive tools, planting different bulbs, propagating carnations in cold frames, digging pansies for "export" to towns in the neighbourhood.



for other crops, such as foliage plants, poinsettia or cyclamen. There are also vents in the back wall as well as in the roof made by bricks. The only thing, which breaks this ancient atmosphere is spotted circular fluorescent lamps furnishing light at early and late working hours. Labor is inexpensive and less than two dollars for 10 hours. No floriculture education is provided and very often "gardening" passes from generation to generation. The Iranian flower grower lives entirely with his flowers; he loves his profession and is very proud of it.

Most of the larger gardens are owned by wealthy people and several belong to the royal court. The flower consumption is very high, not only among people in the upper class. The Iranians are really flower lovers. The Sim carnations were brought in from Holland about 15 years ago. This original stock, which has been self-propagated, is now degenerated. New selected and meristemmed material planted for comparison shows remarkable difference. 60-70% of all carnations grown are red, about 20% pink and dark pink and 15-20% white. Red is demanded by the average people, while the upper class asks for pink, variegated, tangerine and yellow. There is no interest in miniatures as small flowers are considered inferior.

Marketing


There are about 300 flower shops in Teheran, some of them very fancy. Carnations are often artistically arranged in huge baskets, containing 50-100 flowers in the same colour. Arranged carnations in baskets cost about 20-25 cents each, while the growers get 5-15 cents, depending on season. The growers expect about 20-25 blooms per plant over a two-year period, but no special records are kept. Best prices are obtained during early spring, when the Iranians celebrate new year's festival. At that time the growers get up to 20 cents each wholesale.

The Teheran area is considered quite ideal for carnation growing with plenty of sunshine and fairly cool summers because of the altitude. In the North, along the Caspian lake, the climate is too damp and cloudy and in the South it is much too hot and no water is available. In Teheran there is also a very good supply of mountain water of excellent quality. Carnations are "exported" to all other cities of Iran, but never sent abroad. There is a very good and expanding home market for carnations, so why try to compete with European over production.

Ed. Note: Many of our readers know Lennard Hakansson as the personable owner of Solviks Nejlikeodling, Billeberga, Sweden.

When I learned that he made a trip to Teheran, I asked him to give us some of the highlights of carnation culture in that far away place. The above colorful report is the result--WDH.

Your editor,



COLORADO FLOWER GROWERS ASSOCIATION, INC.
OFFICE OF EDITOR
W. D. Holley
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80521

FIRST CLASS