

# gardening

## BOOK RETREAT

It takes more than garden plans and catalogs to forget the snow, rain and winds of winter.

By Pat Leuchtman  
leisure Columnist

It rains. It snows. It freezes. The wind blows and still the winter marches on. There are catalogs to read and plans to make, but it isn't enough.

I turn to books on gardening and the world of plants and I don't mean the *Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening* which is my constant companion during the growing season or even my newly discovered *How to Grow More Vegetables Than You Ever Thought Possible On Less Land Than You Can Imagine* by John Jeavons. I mean books like Vita Sackville-West's *Garden Book*.

The *Garden Book* is a collection of garden columns Miss Sackville-West wrote for the *London Observer* for 14 years. It goes around the year from January to December and in this weather I dove right into the section written for June and read of the old roses, "... the Cabbages, the Moss, the Centifolias, the Gallias, the Musks and the Damasks whose very names suggest a honeyed southern dusk ... There is nothing scrumpy or stingy about them. They have a generosity which is as desirable in plants as in people."

In April she talks about generosi-

ty again and says she likes lavishness in gardens and assures us that in her view even "the smallest garden can be prodigal within its own limits."

Certainly I recognize that she, with her staff of gardeners to tend the famous Sissinghurst Castle gardens, operated on a rather different scale than I do. Still we can commiserate with each other as she recounts errors of judgment, failures of cultivation and the difficulties of having the reality match the vision one carries within one's brain.

A very different type of book is *Fantastic Trees* by Edwin Menninger. This book details some of the "marvels and monstrosities of the arboreal world." Menninger discusses trees that are peculiar in their parts like the *Metrosideros* in New Zealand which often grows sets of roots high in the air on its branches, and trees that are peculiar all over like the Australian bottle tree which does indeed look like a bottle and has a compartment between the inner bark and the wood that holds a considerable quantity of water.

I was fascinated by the discussion and photographs of the banyan tree which develops auxiliary trunks to help support the superstructure. While I was in New York I worked for a man who often referred to banyan trees and used them as a

symbol of our corporation. At one point he set me the task of finding a banyan tree to decorate our board room. When you read the description of a banyan growing in the Calcutta Botanic Garden that has so many trunks it takes 10 minutes to walk around it, you will not wonder that I failed in my assignment.

And when I am done considering Menninger's monstrosities, I turn to Katherine White's *Onward and Upward In the Garden*, a collection of columns she wrote for the *New Yorker* a number of years ago.

After reading about trees that stink and trees that change sex, there is a homely pleasure to read about the delights of a garden scented with mignonette and violet

or the new varieties of snapdragon whose sin is that they are "tetraploid" or have many extra petals.

It can be instructive to read of another's fancies and prejudices and Mrs. White is a woman with definite opinions. She made me consider the beauty of the common zinnia and led me to my new enthusiasm, *Roses of Yesterday and Today*, a company that specializes in selling old-fashioned fragrant roses.

*Onward and Upward* discusses flowers, seed growers and catalogs, books, failure and success in the garden. It is filled with the joy and hope that enlivens plans for next season's bloom and next year's garden, the hope that defines all gardeners. □

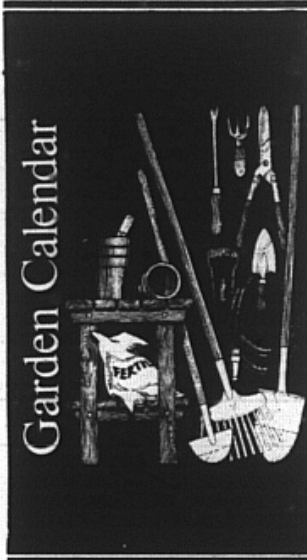
The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

### Now is the time to:

- make a plan of your garden, remembering to use succession planting (when one vegetable is harvested, replace the spot with another).
- get your variety lists for vegetables and various fruits from the Franklin County Extension Service. Be sure to specify what you plan to grow.
- clean dirty pots for spring use with a solution of one part household bleach to five parts warm water. Rinse thoroughly.

### Note:

- Order small fruit plants early.
- Pesticides which have frozen may not be as effective. □



## Plans for a homemade bluebird house

By Kay Fessenden

Walking in the fields on one of those windy March days, when it seems as if spring will never banish winter, I sometimes catch sight of a penetrating flash of blue.

"The bluebird scouts are here already. Heavens to Betsy," I think, and hurry home to make sure that my husband cleaned out the old nests from last year's bluebird boxes.

But it was not always so in our fields. A few years ago we had no bluebirds on the place. A friend explained that we could probably attract them if we put up appropriate housing. Bluebirds, like many cavity nesters, suffer when their habitat is destroyed. They like to find holes in old apple trees near open pasture, but so do sparrows and starlings.

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