HOW TO MAKE A COLD FRAME: BY DAVID DON

Photographs by Courtesy of the U-Bar Greenhouse Co.

WHEN the impatient arum attempts to push its vivid green sheaf of leaves through the ice-bound banks of little brooks that run through the sheltered groves and woodlots, then it is time for us to trust its faith in the coming summer and begin our gardening in cold frames. With a little forethought and good management the blossoming and fruiting time of gardens can be advanced several weeks, an item well worth attention especially in regions where the slow-ripening vegetables are in danger of being harvested by the hoary-fingered Jack Frost instead of by us.

The location of a cold frame, of first importance, may be on the south side of a wall, board fence, greenhouse, barn, earth bank or even on the lee of a hill in some place which is easily reached from the house, for sashes must be frequently opened and closed following the changeful lead of bright or stormy weather. Good drainage must be considered, else water from melting of snows or the spring rains will get caught in them and destroy the plants. A drain dug around the frames will remedy the trouble if natural slope cannot be had.

With the aid of a hotbed, the amateur gardener, as well as the professional, can raise his own early vegetable and flower plants from seeds; and with a little care and attention, can force under the frame some early vegetables such as lettuce and radishes.

Last spring, when you were buying your tomato plants, egg plants, lettuce, etc., it perhaps occurred to you then that some one had to start these plants from seed back in the cold months of February and March. To enable the florist to grow these plants, he had to have a greenhouse or a hotbed. Then, why not, with a little attention and comparatively little expense, have a hotbed and grow these plants yourself?

A hotbed is a very simple affair, easy to handle, does not get out of order, and is good for many years. It is composed of a sash set on a frame, which is placed over a manure pit. The heat from the manure makes and keeps the bed hot and keeps the frost out. The hotbed should be in the sunniest spot in the yard and should slope to the south. It would be an advantage to
have it protected from the north by a board fence or the side of a barn.

The sash is generally 6 feet long by 3 feet wide and can be bought for about $4.50 each.

When it is the purpose to devote the greenhouse to full blooming plants it is an excellent plan to back up a cold frame against it to hold all the slips and seedlings.

To prepare the ground for the hotbed, dig out the soil from two to two and a half feet, the area to accommodate the number of sash you use, and fill this in with fresh horse manure. It is advantageous to dig the foundation two feet wide all around, and fill it in also with manure; this will prevent the frost from creeping in. However, for spring use, a foundation half this depth is sufficient.

Over this manure foundation the frame is set and the corners nailed to upright posts placed at each corner and driven in about 2 or 3 feet. This frame can easily be made of one inch boards 12 inches wide. To get the best slope for the sash, cut off 6 inches from the top of the south-side frame and nail it to the top of the north-side, thus forming a slope from 18 to 6 inches, then adjust the remaining sides accordingly, making sure that all corners and joints have a good snug fit. Place the sash on top of this frame, and the interior will get the full benefit of the sun.

When the seed is sown in February or March, the hotbed must be protected at night and in severe weather, by a burlap or straw mat spread over the top. On bright days this covering should be removed and in the middle of the day the sash should be raised.
a little to give the plants fresh air. Close up the bed about two hours before sundown, and put the coverings on at sunset. Take the chill off the water before sprinkling the plants, and water only on bright days in the morning, as this gives the leaves of the plants time to dry off before night. This will prevent all possibility of the plants damping off.

Much satisfaction and enjoyment may be derived from starting your own egg plants, peppers, tomatoes and vegetable plants from seed, during the months of February and March. With care and attention you can secure sturdier plants and as the warm days come along, can give the plants a gradual hardening-off, so that they will not suffer severe set-back when they are transplanted to the open garden.

Another use of the hotbed is for forcing vegetables such as lettuce, varieties like “Ideal” or “May King” planted in the hotbed in February will be ready for use early in May. Radishes may be had in from four to six weeks if varieties such as “Carmine-forcing” and “White-tipped Scarlet Turnip-forcing” and carrots, if varieties such as “French-forcing” and “Half-long forcing” be used.

Perhaps this seems to involve too much care and attention, but the results obtained will more than repay the effort spent.

Portable frames placed over asparagus or rhubarb plants early in the season will give them several weeks start. Melons

WHERE THE SEASON IS SHORT IT IS AN ADMIRABLE IDEA TO START ALL VEGETABLES IN COLD FRAMES; THIS GREATLY INCREASES THE COMMERCIAL VALUE OF A GARDEN.

started in the small square frames that can be lifted without disturbing the plant will have stronger roots and therefore better flavor as well as earlier start.

Daffodils and tulips will surprise you with perfection of blossoms if protected during the fitful early spring weather with a small portable frame. Zinnias, marigolds, stocks, asters, cosmos can be planted in large cold frames and transplanted later. Pansies and violets sown in cold frames during August will give plants which will bloom in the conservatory during the following March and April. Cold frames are also invaluable for starting Christmas bulbs. Plant them in pots and place them in rows in the cold frames and cover with about a foot of dirt. Beginning in August, plant every two weeks up to November. Do not disturb them for at least eight weeks, so that they may make a vigorous root growth, Fulness of bloom depends on state of root growth. For forcing, place them in a hotbed, half submerging each pot.

Gardens under glass are in more danger of becoming injured by the too ardent sun than of being nipped by the frost. Especially is this true of hotbeds, for they are warmed from beneath by fermentation. They should be closely watched, and fresh air admitted at the right time.