

Gardening

The darling buds of June

WHATEVER the weather may be doing this Saturday morning, it is doing its worst as I write.

Outside all is sodden and sorry. The shrub rose Nevada, 24 hours ago a vision in white from top to toe, resembles an Ascot lovely caught in a cloudburst on Ladies' Day, regretting her proud show of finery that will never be the same again.

While waiting unhelpfully for the forecaster's drier weather to spread slowly from the West, I turn again to the book on the desk and read: 'My border is never ready for display until the first week in July, but is thereafter of increasing interest and beauty, reaching its peak in August and September, and even holding its own in October. . . .

Though the immediate view from the window makes that sort of border sound doubly desirable, the author's aim is not to outwit wet Junes (the month has no monopoly of summer disappointment) but to ensure 'no glaring gaps in July and August left by things which have bloomed for a mere fleeting fortnight or so.

Ambition

'My search is for things which begin to bloom late and then persist in flower for five, six, eight weeks and even for three months and more.'

The writer is H. E. Bates, who, in *A Love of Flowers* (Michael Joseph, £2), has achieved a long-cherished ambition to produce a gardening book. His fulfilment is our luck.

Telling how he creates

BY C. A. MACKINNON

his lasting display of border colour with the minimum of labour, the plants he chooses and those he eschews, is but one of the good turns done for fellow addicts in a very personal book that is always eminently practical, embodying as it does the experience of nearly 40 years of making and remaking a garden. ('The garden that is finished is dead.')

It appears there are darling buds unfolding to enliven H.E.'s ground and greenhouse the year round, and we are introduced to them all.

Who, not already knowing them, will be able to resist trying the neglected Penstemons ('graceful, unobnoxious, unflamboyant'), the annual *Convolvulus minor* ('a ravishing thing glowering in poor soil and much sun'), *Verbena venosa* ('the finest half-hardy perennial that can be raised

as an annual'), *Fuchsia triphylla* Thalia ('a duchess seductive in both leaf and flower'), the undemanding greenhouse gem *Brunfelsia calycina* ('this ethereal creature never sniffs, sulks or pines')—and a host of others championed in these pages?

Humour

Green brains and green fingers may not be enough, as Mr Bates says, for successful gardening, but they certainly help. There are plenty of the first to be picked in *A Love of Flowers*. And since love and laughter go together, one hardly need mention that humour (remember the flower show in *The Country of White Clover*?) blossoms here too.

There are no colour plates in the book. That this reader didn't miss them is not only a tribute to the many half-tone illustrations by artist Pauline Ellison, but also to the author. There are times when the mind's eye can be made to see more clearly than a lens.

It is regretted that C. A. MacKinnon is unable to answer individual reader's queries.

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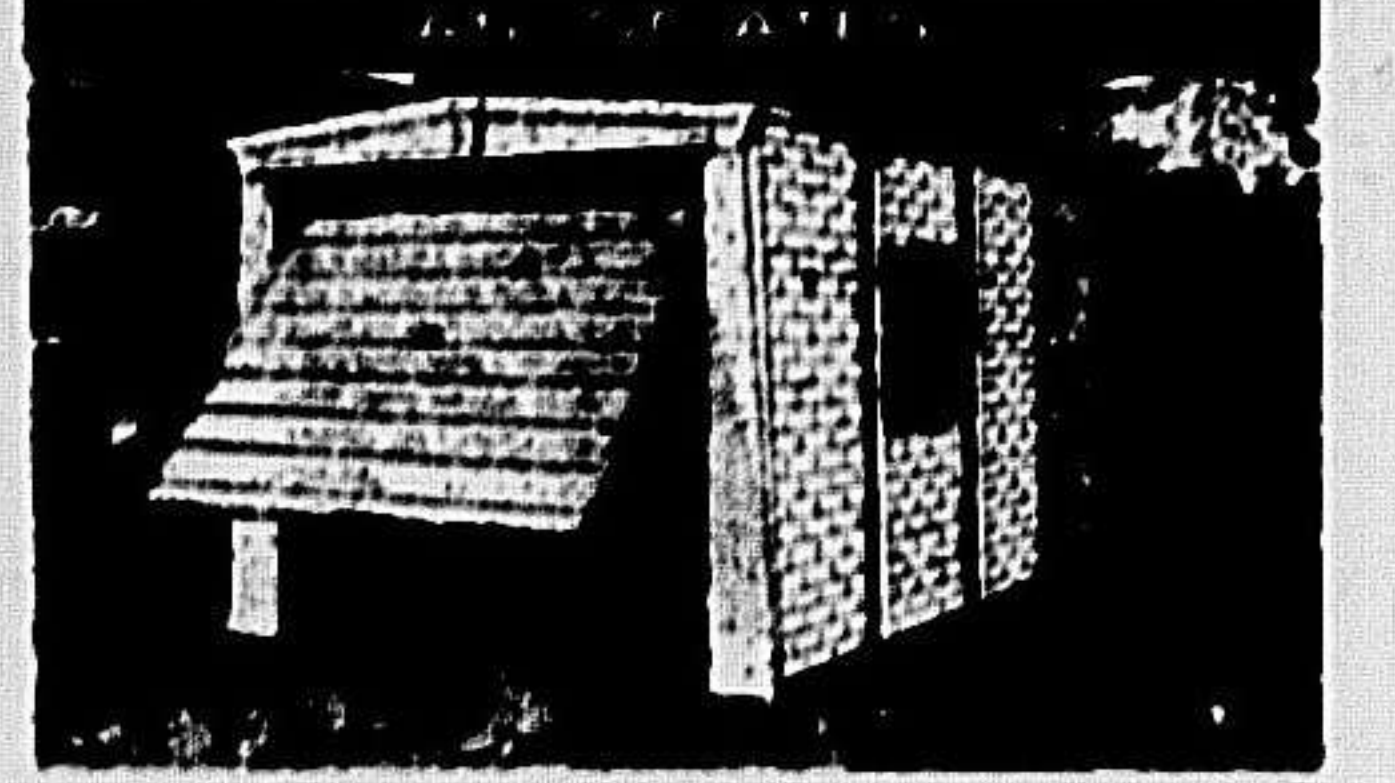
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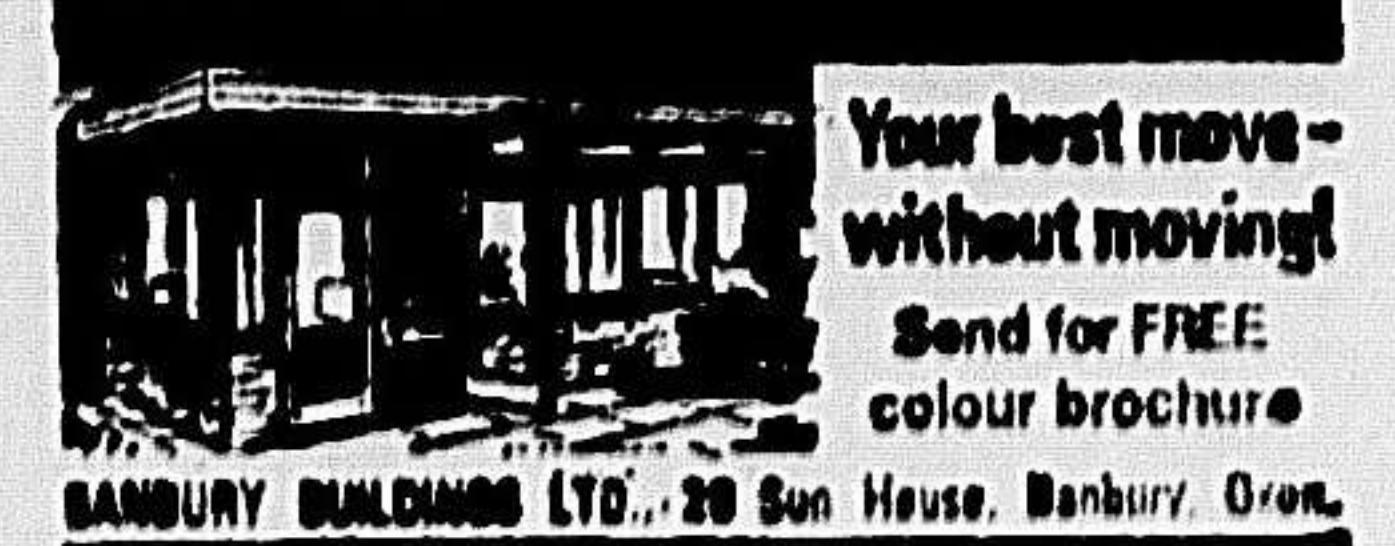
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