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From My Garden by H.E. Bates

One of our favourite novelists describes how his garden grows



Cool House Treasures

If we could raise the mean temperature of these islands by ten degrees, we gardeners might soon have hopes of revelling on the edge of the realms of the sub-tropical. But since our only way of raising the temperature is by heating greenhouses, a highly expensive business these days, the best thing is to consider the possibilities, by no means small, of what we can do with greenhouses that can only be kept at comparatively low temperatures from November to April. You are, of course, reading this article in the month of July—exactly the right time to think of searching for some of those plants, many of which will make you happier early next year. And the range of lovely things that can be grown in such conditions is really quite large and at all times full of fascination.

A few years ago a friend gave me a tiny plant of *Acacia dealbata*, which in more familiar terms is the mimosa that begins to come, with its fluffy yellow puffs of flower, into the shops about Christmas time. Soon it was growing too big for its 3in pot, then for its 6in pot and then, as if fed on old brandy, for its 10in pot. It then got to a stage where it didn't know its own strength and completely burst the 10in pot and flung its highest arms out of the top of the greenhouse. This year I have been able to gather huge armfuls of blossom: and all this in a greenhouse where the mean temperature is somewhere between 45 and 50 deg F.

I once went through all this with a singularly beautiful thing called *Streptosolen Jamesonii*, which has prolific masses of yellow and red-gold flowers that are quite royally luscious. In no time, alas, the affair became a battle between plant and greenhouse, so that soon the first threatened to destroy the latter through sheer mad exuberance and had reluctantly to be thrown out: and again all this in a temperature of 45 to 50 deg F.

Another even more beautiful thing, since it has the most delicious of perfumes, is *Jasminum polyanthemum*, and this too will grow with a certain madness, though happily it can be restricted by pruning or by being confined to pots, in which it can be neatly trained into columns or pyramids that can be brought into the house.

If you seek something of less vigour but possibly of still greater beauty, try to get hold of *Brunfelsia calycina*, still sometimes called *Franciscea calycina* since it was originally named after the Emperor Franz Joseph. You would hardly think that this shrub, coming as it does from the rain forests of Brazil, would be happy in a temperate greenhouse in England in winter. But happy it is, giving us even as early as January, parma violet, crinkled chalices of flower that look as if they have been cut out of pure silk. Another shrub not at all unlike it is *Tibouchina semidicandra* (or *Lasiandra macrantha*) also from Brazil and also having purple flowers, though of a deeper shade. In frost-free conditions this will grow to 15ft or so (and will even grow outside in favoured parts of these islands) but in the greenhouse it can be kept to a tolerable shape

and height by pruning. It too is a gloriously lovely thing.

Last summer a friend gave me two bulbs with which I was not familiar. *Sperkelia Formosissima* does not come, as its name might seem to imply from Formosa, but from Mexico and Guatemala. It has been described as like 'a large insect on a one-foot stem', a description I consider inapt, unless by insect is meant butterfly. To me its deep, warm red flowers look much more like a lordly aristocratic fleur-de-lis. At first I found its enchantment to be all too short lived: then it promptly surprised me by throwing up, within another two weeks, a second batch of flowers, as lovely as the first.

Hymenocallis calithina (sometimes called Peruvian daffodil) really does come from Peru but isn't in my view all that much like a daffodil. It looks more like an exclusive pale cream orchid. The *Hymenocallis* is, alas, not very long lasting but compensates for this by having an exquisite—perhaps for some tastes, an over-exquisite—perfume, even stronger than that of many lilies. At times it isn't at all unlike *Eucharis grandiflora*, which, unhappily, for all its glory, won't tolerate low temperatures.

Nor, you may be told, will *Gloriosa superba*, which as if that name were not grand enough also has a variety known as *Rothschildiana*: but in my experience the tubers shoot up quite readily in a cool house in summer, throwing up 4ft stems which have filiform tendrils that enable them to climb, rather as a sweet pea does. The crowning glory comes in gold and scarlet flowers rather like Turk's Cap lilies with spraying golden stamens.

Another bulb that will tolerate low temperatures and oblige with a very long period of flower in winter is *Veltheimia Deasii*, which comes from South Africa. You can be positively mean to this bulb and it won't mind a bit; you can throw it outside in summer, forget to water it and even forget it altogether, and it will come back smiling, ready to throw up its red-hot poker-shaped flowers of shrimp pink touched with delicate green, altogether not unlike a large lachenalia, another gem from South Africa also happy in low temperatures.

This article is not meant to be, and of course, could not be, a complete catalogue of what you can do with a cool greenhouse, even in winter. It is merely an invitation to adventure. Lovely things await those who care to go out and look. I have scarcely space in which to mention the foliage begonias of which the aptly named *B. Fuchsiodes* is both lovely, delicate and easy, and the stronger but also aptly named *B. Metallica*, easy as pie to propagate and flower. I only wish it were possible to end with one of the loveliest creatures I have ever seen: *Petrea Volubiles*, a kind of infinitely refined wistaria, dark, rich purple in colour, and a kind of semi-climber. Alas, it needs a temperature of 55-60 deg F in winter and you will need to raise both your sights and your temperature if you wish to enjoy its incomparable, ethereal loveliness. □□

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