

■ Plant of the week: *The common Valeriana*

PEOPLE often confuse plants and, in some cases, it can be fatal. For example, many people have eaten the poisonous *nerium oleander* or cherry laurel, thinking it was bay leaves.

With the *Valeriana* the mistake is less dramatic.

The *Valeriana officinalis*, popular for its medicinal properties against hysteria, depression and insomnia grows well in seaside climates where summers are cool, while the *Valerianella locusta* is simply corn salad and is rich in vitamin C.

The red valeriana is actually called *Centranthus ruber* and is rarely used in phytotherapy.

This perennial plant thrives in full sun and poor, limey soils as little more than water and sunshine are needed for it to grow.

It is especially attractive when grown in the crevices of stone walls. Though it is sometimes short-lived in the south, it will reseed. If the wall is hard-surfaced, there is little risk of harm but *restanque* walls (made of dry stone) will have problems within a few years.

In spite of this the *Centranthus ruber* offers a long-lasting show of flowers in the driest and poorest conditions.



Photo: GDB

PHYTOTHERAPY: The Valeriana is well-known for its healing properties

■ Questions and answers

A cherry tree with no fruit

Q I live in Nice centre, in a house built in 1958. The cherry tree must have been planted then – it is huge and its trunk is enormous. All around it are roots and concrete so it is very difficult for me to hoe the soil and add fertiliser. I moved to this house three years ago. The first year I did not give it any attention but I do not recall it bearing many fruits.

The second year, it bore very little fruit. Following some amateur advice, I cut the inner branches to provide oxygen for the centre of the tree, I cemented the cuts and I had a few more cherries. This year when the tree still had its leaves, I cut some branches that were too high. I also sprayed it with a winter treatment product because the end of the branches were full of ants and insects. In April and in May it had lovely blooms but I only got about ten cherries.



NO FRUIT: An ornamental cherry tree can be nice

A This tree should not be considered as a fruit-bearing tree. In the heart of the city, surrounded by all that concrete, it will never yield a proper harvest. On the other hand, you should be proud of its age, size and blooms. Take care of it by avoiding any treatment with products unsuitable for a simple attack of aphids and just prune any dead or old branches. Avoid giving fertilizer but if you can try to spread compost all around its circumference.

Turn all your natural waste into eco-friendly compost

THE town of Le Cannet is making compost boxes available to owners of villas so they can turn organic waste into humus in six months. This natural treatment is practical and uses waste from the garden and kitchen such as vegetable peel or meat remains.

Director of the environment department Jean-Baptiste Crozon said: "In the medium term it will enable us to treat less domestic waste in factories (-30%), or 60 tonnes a year less." There are three sizes of box: 400 litres, 500 litres and 600 litres. Residents may get one in exchange for a €25 to €45 deposit.

The town hall would like to distribute around 400 compost boxes a year. The new equipment is delivered with a small instruction booklet and a list of items which it can recycle.

■ To buy an individual compost box, the owners of villas and gardens must phone the local department of environment: 04 92 18 23 54



Photo: JB

PRACTICAL, ATTRACTIVE: Boxes blend in with garden

Spotlight: Golfe-Juan

Gardeners get to work to plant, prune and lay lawn

NOW the preparation work in the greenhouses is over, the 12 garden services workers of Golfe-Juan are working to plant, replace and prune flowerbeds around the town.

Many are also still busy with renovating and planting the square Nabonnand where they are laying natural lawn in patches.

Spokesman Raymond Segretto said: "This is the best way. If we plant seeds the pigeons will eat everything. Before planting we fork over the soil in an area of about ten centimetres.

"Then we just programme the watering. Our biggest problem is the dogs which dig out the lawns."

The main streets will also be planted with 300 geranium plant boxes which will be hung on the lamp posts.

"We have doubled the number of these suspended plant boxes. The lock-



Photo: Jean Solignac

GREEN: The town's team of 12 gardeners are now busy planting new lawns in Golfe-Juan's Square Nabonnand

smiths at the technical centre have made an extra 150 straps. Thanks to the cuttings taken at the end of winter we were able to plant them without buying new ones.

"After a trial last summer we have now filled the pots with a special substrate which retains more water than normal soil. This saves water and we only need to do it once a week.

"We are also creating flowerbeds at the entrances to the city and on the roundabouts with orange as the dominating colour in the middle of taller plants with blue shades. We are also planning to plant the hills of the Cité du Soleil, the garden of the Val d'Or and the esplanade of the Espace-Loisirs with flowers and trees including sage, dahlia, begonia, alstroemia, cosmos and tango."