

Chapter 1 : Charles H. Baker Jr. - Wikipedia

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Observations on British Trees and Shrubs Sect. Observations on Plants cultivated for culinary purposes Sect. Observations on Wild Plants useful for culinary purposes, which are not in cultivation Sect. Observations on Plants useful for Dyeing Sect. Observations on Plants used in rural oeconomy Poisonous plants growing in great Britain, And their best recommended Antidotes. Observations on Plants noxious to cattle Sect. Observations on Annual Weeds, or such as grow wild and do not produce food for cattle Observations on Weeds with creeping roots Observations on Perennial Weeds Sect. Observations on Exotic Trees and Shrubs, and the soil to which each is best adapted Sect. Observations on Foreign Hardy Herbaceous Plants, with the soil which each is found to thrive best in Sect. Observations on Hardy Annual Flowers, with the seasons for sowing each Sect. Observations on Hardy Biennial Flowers, with their culture Sect. Observations on Tender Annual Flowers Sect. One would therefore naturally wonder, after this truth has been so long published, and that in an age when agriculture and the arts have so much improved, that Select Seeds of this tribe of plants are scarcely to be produced. From the experience I have had on this subject, I find their culture is attended with certain difficulties, which arise not so much from the nature of the plants, as from the labour requisite to this purpose, great attention being necessary for saving Grass-seeds at the seasons when the farmer must exert all the strength of his husbandmen to get his other business accomplished. The only mode by which this can be effected is by selecting a proper soil for the kinds intended to be saved. The seeds should be drilled into the ground at about one foot distance; and care taken that the plants are duly weeded of all other kinds that may intrude themselves, before they get too firm possession of the soil. The hoe should be frequently passed between the drills, in order both to keep the land clean and to give vigour to the young plants. The sowing may be done either in the spring or in the month of September, which will enable the crop to go to seed the following spring. In order to preserve a succession of crops, it is necessary every season to keep the ground clean all the summer months, to dig or otherwise turn up the land between the drills early in the spring, and to be particular in the other operations until the seeds ripen. Now this business being so inconvenient to the farmer, it is not to be wondered at, that, wherever attempts of this kind have been made, they should fail from want of the necessary care as above stated, without which it is needless to speculate in such an undertaking. There is nevertheless still an opportunity, for any one who would give up his land and time to the pursuit, to reap a rich and important harvest; as nothing would pay him better, or redound more to his credit, than to get our markets regularly supplied with select seeds of the best indigenous Grasses, so that a proper portion of them may be used for forming pasture and meadow-land. The above hints are not thrown out by a person who wishes to speculate in a theory which is new, but by one who has cultivated those plants himself both for seed and fodder, and who would readily wish to promote their culture by stating a mode which has proved to him a profitable pursuit, and for which he has, already, been honoured with a reward from the Society of Arts. Page 3 The following observations are intended to embrace such kinds only as are likely to be cultivated, with those that are distinguished for some particular good properties; as it would be impossible within the limits of this small memorandum to enumerate all the plants that are eaten by cattle. The same mode shall be pursued under all the different heads in this department. It is an early, though not the most productive grass, and is much relished by all kinds of cattle. It is highly odoriferous; if bruised it communicates its agreeable scent to the fingers, and when dry perfumes the hay. It will grow in almost any soil or situation. About three pounds of seed should be sown with other grasses for an acre of land. About two bushels of seed will sow an acre, with a proportionate quantity of Clover; which see. We do not know if the cultivation of this plant has as yet been attempted. Walker, in his History of the Hebrides, speaks very favourably of this grass. I have therefore noticed it here, but I do not think it so good as many others. It grows on the sandy hills near Combe Wood in Surrey, and forms the principal part of the pasturage; but it is neither very productive, nor are cattle observed to thrive on it. The seeds are very small; one peck would sow an acre. Fiorin is the Irish name of butter]. It is

perfectly distinct from any species of *Agrostis* indigenous to this country: It has the power, when the stalks are ripe, of resisting putrefaction, and will become blanched and more nutritious by being cut and laid in heaps in the winter season, at which time only it is useful. The cultivator of this plant must not expect to graze his land, but allow all the growth to be husbanded as above; and although it will not be found generally advantageous on this account, it nevertheless may be grown to very great advantage either in wet soils, or where land can be flooded at pleasure. Page 4 The seeds are often barren; and the only mode is to plant the shoots or strings in drills at nine inches apart, laying them lengthways along the drills, the ends of one touching the other. Water-fowl are very fond of the young sweet shoots, as also of the seeds; it may therefore be introduced into decoys and other places with good effect. Pulling up the plants and throwing them into the water with a weight tied to them, is the best mode of introducing it. If it be planted in a sandy place, during its growth in the summer the loose soil will be collected in the herbage, and the grass continues to grow and form roots in it; and thus is the hillock increased. Local acts of parliament have been passed, and now exist, for preventing its destruction on the sea-coast in some parts of Great Britain, on this account. It has the property of throwing up flowerstalks all the summer; hence its produce is considerable, and it appears to be well adapted to pasture. The seeds of this grass are not to be obtained separately; hence it is not in cultivation. It is however worthy of attention, as the seeds are produced very abundantly in its native places of growth. It will grow either in wet or dry soils. It grows in dry soils. There is a variety of it with knobby roots which is found to be a most troublesome and noxious weed in arable lands, particularly in some parts of the coast of Hampshire where it abounds. This variety was some years ago introduced into the island of St. Kitts, and it has since taken such firm possession of the land as to render a large district quite useless. Persons should be cautious how they speculate with weeds from appearances only. It is bitter to the taste. Curtis has given a very clear account of this grass, which he says predominates much in the meadows near London, but that the seeds are usually ripe and the grass dried up before the hay time: It has seldom occurred to me to differ in opinion from this gentleman, who certainly has given us, as far as it goes, a most perfect description of our useful grasses: Whoever examines the seeds of this grass will be led to admire how wonderfully it is fitted to make its way into the soil at the season of its ripening, when the land is thus covered with the whole produce of a meadow. I notice this curious piece of mechanism [Footnote: Many seeds of the grasses are provided with awns which curl up in dry weather and relax with moisture. Thus by change of atmosphere a continued motion is occasioned, which enables the seeds to find their way through the foliage to the soil, where it buries itself in a short time in a very curious manner. If the seeds of this grass were collected and introduced in some meadows where it is not common, I am sure the early feeding would be thereby improved. The seeds are sometimes mixed with those of Rye-grass at market, and it is known by the name of Cocks: If any one should be inclined to make the above experiment, two pecks of the seed sown on an acre will be sufficient. The seeds are to be purchased sometimes at the seedshops. About twelve pounds will sow an acre. Walker states this plant to be remarkably agreeable to cattle, and that it grows nearly three feet high in mountainous situations and very exposed places. As this grass does not grow wild in this part of the country, we have no opportunity of considering its merits. In our Botanic Garden it seldom exceeds the height of ten inches or a foot. It is the earliest grass of all our British species, being often in bloom in February. The above intelligent gentleman, who seems to have studied the British Gramina to a considerable extent, says that the following kinds give considerable food to sheep and cattle in such situations; I shall therefore mention their names, as being with us of little esteem and similar to the above. *Carex gigantea*, probably *Pseudocyperus*. *Carex trigona*, probably *vulpina*. *Carex elata*, probably *atrata*. *Carex nemorosa*, probably *pendula*. And he is of opinion that the seeds may be sown to advantage. Be this as may, the observation can only apply to situations in the north of Britain, where he has seen them wild; in this part of the island we have a number of kinds much better adapted to soil, climate, and fodder. Every sheep-farm should be provided with a due portion of this on the land; but no more should be grown than is wanted for early feed, and what can be kept closely eaten down all the season. If it is left to get up it forms large tufts, and renders the field unsightly, and scarcely any animal will eat it when grown old or when dried in the form of hay. The seed is to be bought; two bushels per acres is sown usually alone. I have seen a meadow near Bognor where it formed the principal part of the herbage; and it was

represented to me by the owner as the best meadow in the neighbourhood, and the hay excellent [Footnote: Curtis observes that this grass grows thin on the ground after a time. I have sometimes observed this to be the case in the Botanic Garden, but it is otherwise in its native state of growth. Nothing stands the dry weather better, or makes a more firm sward. Page 7 The seeds of this grass are small, and about one bushel would sow an acre of ground. Red or creeping fescue-grass. It does not produce fertile seeds with us in the garden. It has been justly esteemed by Mr. Curtis and all other persons practically acquainted with the produce of our meadows. It will grow in almost any soil that is capable of sustaining a vegetable, from the banks of rivulets to the top of the thin-soiled calcareous hills, where it produces herbage equal to any other plant of the kind; and all descriptions of cattle eat it, and are nourished by the food. The plant is of easy culture, as it yields seeds very abundantly, and they grow very readily. I have made some excellent meadows with this seed, which after a trial of ten years are now equal to any in the kingdom. The culture of the seed selected is now nearly lost, which is a misfortune, I had almost ventured to say a disgrace, to our agriculture. In fact, I am of opinion that these are often confounded together, and the merits of the former applied to this, although they are different in many respects. This plant was introduced into our garden many years ago, and still preserves this difference; otherwise it is in all respects the same as the *Festuca ovina*. Where I have seen it wild, it is certainly very good; but it is liable to the objection of *Festuca elatior*, the seeds grow but sparingly. Yorkshire grass, or meadow soft-grass. I am not an advocate for it. It is late in blooming, and consequently not fit for the scythe at the time other grasses are; and I find the lower foliage where it occurs in meadows to be generally yellow and in a state of decay, from its tendency to mat and lie prostrate. I hear it has been cultivated in Yorkshire; hence probably its name. Two bushels of the seed would sow an acre; and it is sometimes met with in our seed-shops.

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