

# Winter Flowers Thrive On Frigid Temperatures

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — A funny thing happened on the way to the College Park campus of The University of Maryland the other day.

While University employees labored just before a killing frost to remove fading begonias from the campus, just across US 1 pink and white flowers were bursting out in blossoms in front of the horticulture department's greenhouse.

And horticulture specialists plan to leave the flowering plants in place until well after the New Year.

Folly? No, says Dr. William E. Healy, a floriculture specialist for The

University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service.

It's a grand experiment, he says, to show area homeowners that, even though the frost is on the pumpkin, they can have winter and their flowers, too.

The plants are called "flowering kale" and "flowering cabbage," according to Healy, who provides greenhouse operators and landowners advice on how to capitalize on the fact that the Baltimore-Washington D.C. metropolitan area makes up the largest market in the country for fresh-cut flowers.

"Both of these flowering plants are great crops for homeowners this time of year," says Healy.

"They'll last well beyond Christmas."

Actually, flowering kale and cabbage need killing frosts to turn color. The more consistent the cold weather, the longer they survive.

"The plants look like plain cabbage until the first hard frost that kills everything else off. Then the foliage turns color, which can range from white to dark lavender," Healy explains.

The plants were bred in Japan and just now have become widely available in this country.

"We wanted to set up a demonstration here in front of the greenhouse to show homeowners that their garden doesn't have to be a barren wasteland after the

first frost," Healy adds.

There are just two small catches, according to Healy.

First, pray that cold weather stays fairly cold until the real Spring thaw.

"If you get a freak day in the 80s sometime in January, the plants

will turn to mush," Healy says.

Second, the plants are difficult to raise from seed, and seeds themselves are hard to get.

"You're better off requesting small plants for transplanting from your local nursery or greenhouse," Healy adds.



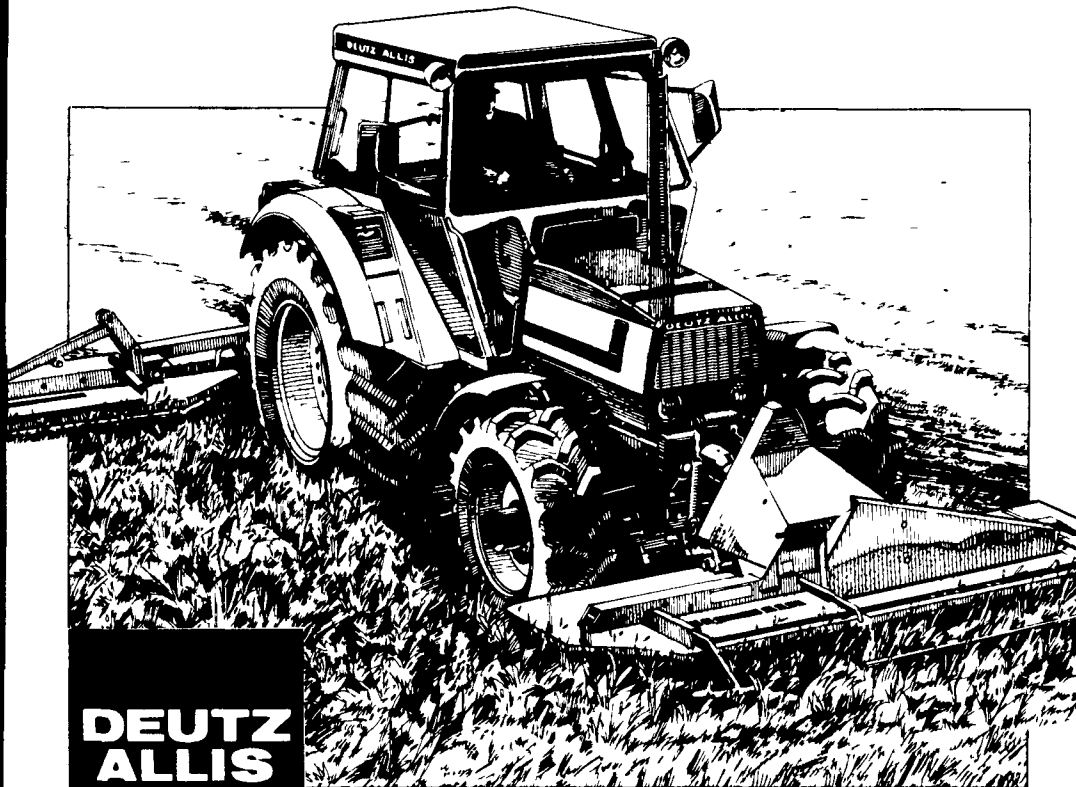
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