ART IN ORNAMENTAL PLANTING: ILLUSTRATED BY A MISTAKE IN LANDSCAPE GARDENING: BY GRACE TABOR

The really wise man has discovered that he often learns more through his mistakes than he does by his successes; and although this is an expensive way of accumulating knowledge, the wise man consoles himself with the thought that it is a very sure way. There are, however, experiences which one can hardly afford to pay for by blunders, because the blunders cost too much in time, energy and money. Landscape gardening may be reckoned as one of these experiences, for you see a garden requires years to grow up, and mistakes in early training can only be discovered when it is difficult to rectify them, and the worse the mistakes are the more conspicuous they grow from year to year. The little shrub in the wrong place this spring grows up into an accusing mistake next year. And so the best way to grow wise about gardening is to study from the mistakes of others, and this article offers a lesson in landscape planting by showing how a garden was in the first place made an eyesore instead of a beauty, and what was done to all this bad management to convert the lawns and walks and shrubs into a beautiful setting for a charming house.

When I first saw the garden in question, it seemed to me that nearly every offense possible against art in planting and arrangement had been committed. For my illustrations in this article I am submitting two plans, first the one of the garden as it was originally planted, and second, my own suggestion for replanting it in harmony with the house, the slope of the land and the fundamental purpose of all landscape gardening—beauty of line and color and proportion.

If you will look at the original plan you will see that the first and most glaring fault in the arrangement is the entire absence of any sense of spaciousness; the lovely sloping lawn might as well have been a small, flat suburban lot so far as it conveyed any impression of space and breadth. Not only did the garden itself seem cramped and distorted, but it actually appeared to crowd back against the house, as though there had not been room enough in the first place to afford the building a position with sufficient elbow room. You will notice also that large shrubs were set close against the house, shutting off all view of the grounds and surrounding country from either porch or windows. Thus, instead of “planting in” the
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VIEW OF GARDEN AS ORIGINALLY PLANTED, SHOWING THE WRONG MASSING OF FOLIAGE, THE HEDGING IN OF THE LAWN AND THE LOSS OF OUTLOOK BY A MISTAKE IN LANDSCAPE GARDENING.

grounds to set off the house, and framing the wide lawns by mass planting to its outermost limits, the gardener "planted out" practically all the beauty of the slope itself and lost the distant views besides. Foliage is massed about the house, and the only stretch of lawn is invisible both from the road and the house itself by being enclosed with a hard formal hedge which runs in a stiff line along the boundary.

This is exactly reversing the correct order of things in landscape gardening. The architecture of a dwelling house should always be revealed freely, and the view of it should be unhampered from the roof to ground; there should be only low-growing shrubs near the foundation, while masses of shrubs or trees should mark boundary lines and fill the base and the sweeping curves of walks and drives. And yet about the house, if you will notice the original drawing, you will see magnificent shrubs fifteen and twenty feet high crowded close to the foundation and a walk made impassable because of shrubs which run along the top of the terrace which sloped sharply to the driveway. All the walks, terraces and drives have the effect of being cramped and isolated by a growth of tall shrubs or trees. Over the porch a crimson rambler drapes itself, combining with the
shrubs to destroy the faintest outlook. From the southeast view of the house there should have been a clean sweep of vision straight down to the distant sea, but on this side magnolias close to the house and an orchard beyond prevent a glimmer of the water, and a circle of shrubs choke off even the sight of the little lawn.

Not only are the trees and shrubs actually in the way in this original plan, but even in the very planting there is no symmetry. Everything seems to have been done in pairs, and the shrubs are not related to the scheme or to the lawns or to the house. Even the color scheme seems to have been ignored in the doing of this garden. Looking from the porch over a bed which obstructs the entrance walk there was only bare earth until July. Then coleus and petunias filled in the space; later salvia appeared, making a color combination too dreadful for words, and the plants being hardy the colors screamed aloud until frost. In the closed-in lawn, which is a prisoner from every point of view on the grounds, there stands a foolish urn, which is neither decorative nor useful. In driving up to the house, according to the old plan, one had a sense of turning abrupt corners, of apprehension lest one should meet another vehicle on the narrow
driveway, and always the feeling of being shut in, of seeing the entire estate in patches without pleasure or appreciation.

In the second plan the idea has been to relate the lawns and driveways to each other and to the house, to plant in such a way as to secure and hold every possible bit of view. The slope of the land about the house is by nature very beautiful, curving down from the foundation in all directions save southwest. This suggested at once bringing a drive in long curves from the road to the doorway, for driveways and walks should always run along the easiest way, just as paths do in woods and fields, or at least they should give one the sense of doing so. The walk was also made a graceful, easy grade from street to house; this to avoid cutting through the lawn, which in the new plan was made to spread its restful green across the entire slope in front of the house. Groups of shrubs hide the terrace steps from the street, also the carriage steps at the side, and irregular masses enclose the lawn in front and on the north. Similar masses hide the vegetable garden and afford an excuse for the Y in the drive as it comes from the street, suggesting a division between the fruit trees and the purely ornamental portions of the planting on the south. The only trees left near the house are an elm and a chestnut, both tall and high-branching trees, affording a view underneath their lowest branches. Large shrubs are used along the boundaries; medium-sized shrubs alone are employed within the grounds and always at a distance from the house, and only the lowest varieties are planted about the house and on the terrace at the north. Vines are confined to the columns of the porch, framing the open spaces. The crimson rambler roses are transplanted to the solid wall and over the trellises at a distance, so that at last from the porch one can see all the beauty about the house, the country beyond, and from the southeast section, the glimpse of the ocean, everything being planned to admit light and air to the house and to extend the view in every desirable direction.