CONVERTING BACKYARDS INTO GARDENS:
THE HAPPINESS AND ECONOMY FOUND IN
CULTIVATING FLOWERS AND VEGETABLES:
BY MARY RANKIN CRANSTON

BACKYARDS and beauty have not usually been con-
sidered synonymous terms. There is really no reason
why they should not be, however, for the backyard
offers opportunities equal to those of a front garden
for attractive planting which will express the person-
ality of the owner. The backyard naturally must
be developed in a practical way, for its uses are so
distinctly utilitarian, but happily in gardening the beautiful and
the useful may harmonize. The spring sunshine is apt to remind
the householder that the time has come to clear up and beautify his
house and lot, especially the backyard, whose unsightly condition
after the neglect of winter calls aloud for attention. As Kipling tells
the little boy in the “Just So” song;

“The cure for this ill
Is not to sit still
And frowst with a book by the fire;
But to get a large hoe
And a shovel also,
And dig till you gently perspire.”

Before undertaking a task so arduous, it is well first to be sure
that the “large hoe and shovel also” will give the best results. If
the backyard is in the condition which the builders of a new house
have left it, it is probable that nothing short of a plow will break up
the ground to a sufficient depth for fertilization, which it will certainly
need.

When this is done and the soil pulverized, the next step is to lay
out the necessary paths, always remembering that the successful
path is the shortest distance between two points, especially bearing
in mind the butcher boy and ash man, who will soon mark out such
paths for themselves. Among the workmen’s debris which still
litters the yard there may be some red bricks out of which a herring-
bone brick walk could be made, the prettiest walk in the world for
a garden, especially if it has a border of box or close clipped privet
along either side. Some enterprising young women who had deter-
mined to have an old-fashioned formal garden which was to cost
nothing laid out such a herring-bone walk with their own hands.
Cinders, good cinders, are also valuable for garden paths.

Grass is unfortunately almost the greatest of luxuries, much more
WHAT VINES CAN DO FOR A SIMPLE BACKYARD: PHOTOGRAPH OF THE RESULT OF PRIZE VINE GROWING CONTEST INAUGURATED BY THE CLEVELAND CLIFFS IRON CO.

SHOWING THE BEAUTY OF GOOD LAWNS AND VINE DRAPE WALLS IN A COMMON GARDEN.
SOME FACTORY DWELLINGS WHERE NO EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO BEAUTIFY STREET, PATHS OR PORCHES.
VIEW OF A GERMAN MANUFACTURING VILLAGE WHERE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EFFORTS HAVE MADE THE SURROUNDINGS ATTRACTION.
SHOWING THE USE OF MORNING GLORIES TO MAKE ATTRACTION A HUMBLE BACKYARD.

BACKYARD OF A BUSY WORKMAN, RENDERED EFFECTIVE BY LABOR AND THE RIGHT USE OF A VERY LITTLE MONEY.
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so than people usually think, for grass seed is expensive and the preparation of the ground for its reception is more difficult than for vegetable or flower seeds.

A brand new garden ought first to have an ideal, and then a workable design, and as much as possible it should also be a place for pleasant remembrances, reminders of other spots from which plants and seeds have been collected, and an inheritor of the good things from the gardens of one’s friends. Every true garden lover will rejoice to share her bulbs, excess of seeds and roots with others. A lady who is now raising fruit from seeds out of the Pope’s Vatican garden has a doubled pleasure in watching them develop. Bits of ivy collected from the palace of Caligula and from Tintern Abbey are now growing quite contentedly over American homes. Seeds may be sent by mail or carried by friends in order to make the new garden rich with pleasant associations.

As one man’s meat is another man’s poison so the despised weeds of one spot would be accounted choice plants somewhere else. One of the Hawaiian diplomats carried American dandelions to Honolulu because he admired them so much. With all the wonderful profusion of bloom in the Hawaiian Islands there were no dandelions.

A FLOWER garden need cost almost nothing, for if there is no one else to contribute to the new garden, Nature will offer all her treasure of wood and roadside; a wild flower garden has great possibilities and the forest has young trees enough, and to spare, to give to all who ask. A clump of white birches or a young beech is worth a visit to the wood-lot. In the meanwhile something which will grow in a hurry is desirable to take away the painful newness of the backyard. First the garden should be planned with space enough allowed for clothes lines, and whatever greensward is desired; garden work must then begin in February or early March when sweet peas should be planted. Ten cents’ worth of sweet peas will make a double row the length of a fifty-foot garden, and will answer for a division fence unless there is a fence already built, which they could cover. If the exposure is not very good, a straight line of canna may be used effectively, for canna are among the serviceable things which will grow almost anywhere, and can often be had for the asking from some neighbor who is probably groaning with more than she knows what to do with. Golden glow and chrysanthemums have the same tendency to overrun all creation and are usually an embarrassment of riches to their possessors.

The vegetable garden, if it is only as big as a pocket handkerchief, will furnish half a dozen kinds of vegetables for a quarter of a dollar
and some hard work. A parsley bed once started will last indefinitely if covered in the winter; as parsley germinates so slowly, lettuce seed may be sown with it, and the lettuce will grow and be eaten before the parsley needs the space. Parsley, lettuce, bush beans, radishes, Swiss chard, beets and onions would grow in a place twenty-five feet by twelve, and for another quarter of a dollar and an equal amount of space, one could raise as many flowers, taking care to plant those which will not all bloom at the same season.

In the shady spots lilies of the valley will grow, spread and bloom year after year. If they are not possible, another little journey to the woods will provide a perennial garden of slender fern fronds which will last forever. Another fine asset for the shady spot—the most perplexing problem for the amateur gardener—is calladium or "elephant's ears;" they are not very cheap, costing as much as fifteen cents a bulb sometimes, but half a dozen bulbs will make a stately group in some dreary corner where even the optimistic nasturtium would give up the fight for life.

Never forget the best friend of the forlorn garden plot and the impecunious pocketbook—nasturtiums. One can have them in profusion for ten cents and in riotous masses for twenty-five cents, climbing ones to cover the unsightly places, and little bush ones for the empty flower beds. They are sturdy, independent flowers, too, and will just about take care of themselves. A real city backyard garden I knew grew a profusion of roses, practically defying all gardening laws, for the sun was on one side of the yard only until ten in the morning and on the other after three in the afternoon, yet there were roses enough to deck the house in masses for a June wedding. Just why they grow so wonderfully well under no better conditions, no one knows except that there seems to be an understanding between plants and some plant lovers which has not yet been quite explained.

YOU may prove to a busy brain worker that making garden is as good for brain fag as a course at Muldoon's, but when once you have persuaded him to begin, it will be from no hope of advantage but from sheer love of the good brown earth that he will keep at it; for the pull of the soil, inherited from many generations, is in most of us and gardening is an appetite which grows by what it feeds on.

A garden spot in the city's grimness has a real dollars and cents value, too, for scarcely any mundane toiler who must live where transit facilities and his inelastic pocketbook permit him but will thankfully rush to pay his rent where there is a breathing spot of greenery.

In London there is a depressing row of uniform, jail-like houses,
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noticeably gloomy even for Bloomsbury. Nevertheless they are always well-rented because, behind the houses, the Duke of Bedford, who owns the neighborhood, has reserved a strip of land the length of the block which he keeps laid out and planted with annuals and hardy perennials.

One impassioned gardener with an unsightly yard in a crowded street of a large town laid out a garden forty feet square. Around the sides she had a border two feet wide of lettuce and radishes. Down either side she had an oblong bed of onions, beans and beets, and in the center a flower garden with zinnias, asters, poppies, balsam, phlox, bachelor’s buttons, marigolds and nasturtiums. As it was surrounded by an ugly fence, corn was planted around the sides for a screen. All of the seeds for this garden cost sixteen cents, and the simple directions for its care were to fertilize the soil, water well morning and evening and weed all the time.

One garden plot in the center of a small city is worth considering, because of its practical arrangement. It is only fifty-five feet wide. The actual garden space in the rear amounts to about fifty feet square and in this space there is room for currants, raspberries, strawberries, rhubarb and asparagus, which are perennial and after being once planted will continue to yield with care and fertilizing without increased expense for many years. Twenty-five feet square is left for annual vegetables, which can be planted each year at a cost of two or three dollars, supposing one were to buy tomato, egg and pepper plants already started; if seeds are used, of course, the cost will be less. By carefully using all vacant spaces and planting lettuce, parsley and carrots, which are feathery and effective for that purpose, for borders, as many as ten or twelve kinds of vegetables can be placed in this small space. Beans, eggplants, peppers, onions, spinach, peas, beets, lettuce, parsley, radishes, carrots and Swiss chard are easy, quick growers. Tomatoes, pole beans and corn would be equally practical, but would exclude other vegetables. Many people do not know that beets can be cut down and used for greens with advantage to the beet root and to the consumer, and that Swiss chard is thoroughly successful in small gardens because it will grow again after it is cut; thus it can take the place of spinach for the hot months when spinach will do nothing. Currant bushes which can be kept well trimmed make a good dividing hedge and a profitable one, as well. One gardening enterprise which proves how profitably space can be utilized yielded enough currants to make sixty glasses of jelly, with fresh fruit to spare and share with the neighbors, and all from twelve well cared for bushes. Raspberries which are too trailing for a hedge are most effective as a covering
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for an unsightly fence. An effective use of simple pergolas and
trellises will beautify a small place and afford support and help in
screening off little out-of-door nooks for the hammock or the tea
table. In the fifty-five-foot lot plan, of which we have spoken, a
grape trellis supports sixteen grape vines. In another corner some
grapes which had proved unsuccessful for eating yielded last year
one hundred glasses of grape jelly and that with almost no culture.
In this same garden plot there were six fruit trees, beds of roses and
lilies, with space for annuals. A sundial was made by one of the
family, the encasing box being wood filled with concrete.

Probably there is no more ideally lovely vine in the world than
the grape, and a little pruning and care will make it a dense and
beautiful shelter from the sun and from the street's publicity, while
of all the odors in Nature's pharmacy there is none so elusively sweet
as that of young grape shoots in early summer. While the grapes
are getting their start, their trellises may be covered for the first sum-
mer with madeira or gourd vines, taking care not to plant them too
thickly lest you smother the young grape vines.

Gourd vines grow very rapidly, as Jonah's did of old. One gar-
den which had a gourd vine growing near the street tempted all the
neighbors to come and beg for a gourd which they marked with
initials, cut with a penknife in the young green cups. When fall
came and the vines succumbed to the frost the neighbors arrived to
collect their property of yellow gourd cups. There is nothing which
better socializes a neighborhood than gardening.

Only Jack's bean stalk can rival Jonah's gourd in rapid growth.
There is a climbing bean which is not good to eat but beautiful to see;
the leaves of it shade from green into softest brown with purplish
undertones, the pods are long and brownish purple and the blossoms
are exquisite tones of violet shading to brown. There are other
gorgeous beans, some with scarlet and some with white blossoms
which are good for food, and pretty and rapid of growth. For quick
screening of bare fences or ugly objects nothing is better than the
morning-glory. It responds at once to the least bit of care and will
soon transform an unattractive spot into a thing of beauty for all
summer.

HAPPY is the tenant who falls heir to the home of a garden lover
who has planted rhubarb or asparagus, fruit trees or grapes.
An asparagus bed is a mine of riches in May and June, and old
apple trees will benefit an entire generation. There is so little we can do
in this world which is at all likely to be remembered to our credit
after us that we might at least, like Johnny Appleseed, plant fruit trees.
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I have heard of two old and rather neglected trees which in nineteen hundred and seven bore nine barrels of hand-picked apples and half as many barrels of windfalls.

A concrete dial is a very pretty decoration for any slightly formal garden. It takes the soft weather stains well and serves as a fixed center for keeping the divergent paths straight and orderly. In laying out a circular garden as the Japanese do, a dial would make a very good axis. Flowers, like four-o’clocks, which bloom at stated times, should surround a sundial; it is said that Linnaeus could tell the time of day from his window by the blossoms which were open around his dial, but, practically, conventional flowers like tulips help to keep the regularity of line which saves a garden from looking tangled. Bulb beds have also the advantage of variety. With a couple of packages of seeds, the tulip bed will be one of poppies in July and of asters in September.

If the town lot has some natural advantage like a depression, a little study can make the garden charming. A sunken garden may need very little grading, if Nature helps out a bit, and a rise of ground at the back means an easily possible terrace with steps and a tea arbor enlarging the piazza possibilities of a small place.

Less and less does the busy American woman desire to live on her front porch, and rear porches demand a pleasant outlook and are helping to do away with the unsightly backyard. There is almost no condition which cannot be made effective, and before the inconsiderate iconoclast gets the yard to level it off, it will be well to see if it cannot be used as it is with better results.

An abandoned quarry turned into a wild flower garden is not more remarkable than the use made of an old barn site. The latter was on a piece of rising ground and three sides of the foundation were left up as a protection from the winds. The old walls were covered with berry bushes trained against them and the floor of earth was spaded up and planted. The exposure was good and vegetables grew there earlier and later than in less protected places. A red brick wall at the back of one’s garden is also a boon. Even the matter of the driveway may make or mar the house, while the most unpromising house conceivable may be saved, or at least bettered, by a tasteful planning of garden, walks and walls.