THE GARDEN AS A CIVIC ASSET, AND SOME SIMPLE WAYS OF MAKING IT BEAUTIFUL:
BY MARY RANKIN CRANSTON

Quite as much individuality may be expressed in the planning of home surroundings, the flower and vegetable gardens, as in the home itself. Just as the interior of the house discloses the inner life of the family, so do the home grounds reflect the family's ideal of the larger, or civic, life. A well kept, orderly garden indicates a responsible personality; a neglected dooryard is a sign of shiftlessness. The most satisfactory gardens are those which seem to have little formality of plan, but whose natural appearance is in reality the result of artistic arrangement and the guiding hand of the true lover of Nature.

Nor is a large lot necessary to secure a pretty setting for the house. Where the building occupies almost all of the yard space it is still possible to do a great deal in the way of improvement. Window boxes give a touch of brightness to the dreariest exterior, a border around the house of petunias in spring and summer, and chrysanthemums in the autumn will relieve the bare appearance of a dwelling too near the street to permit of flower beds. A divisional fence of woven wire, where families cannot be persuaded to part with the side fence, will be a pleasure all summer long if it is covered with sweet peas, nasturtiums, cypress vine or the humble morning-glory. The side gate may have an arch over it made of ordinary lead or iron piping, covered with a climbing rose, wistaria or honeysuckle. Such an arch has even been made of barrel staves. The earth should be well pulverized and enriched if a rapid growth is desired. When a pet dog of mine died and I could not bear the thought of giving him over to the ash man, I buried him beneath a rosebush which for some unknown reason refused to make rapid growth. The next season's growth was phenomenal, which proved the wisdom of my experiment and gave me the additional happiness of the fanciful belief that my dog was still with me in spirit.

If there is space for a border along the side fence, nothing is more beautiful for this purpose than phlox or golden glow. Or, if the mistress of the house is of a practical turn of mind she can divide the border between ornamental plants and vegetables, placing the flowers nearest the street and finishing out the bed with such vegetables as lettuce, radishes, dwarf peas or bush beans. It is a pity the carrot is placed so far down the list of desirable vegetables, for it is one of the most wholesome, and quite ornamental as a border plant.

The yield from the smallest garden spot is astonishing, if the ground
THE GARDEN AS A CIVIC ASSET

is well fertilized and cultivated. Vegetables are best planted in rows, running from north to south. If space can be left to run the hand cultivator in between and the plants can be properly watered, by successive plantings fresh vegetables may be had from early spring until late fall.

A PERGOLA is useful as well as ornamental, for besides giving shade it also affords privacy without having the appearance of being a screen. On a fifty-foot lot, which leaves only a narrow space between house and fence line, there is little privacy without an arbor of some sort, or shrubbery. It would be an easy matter to construct an arbor the whole length of the walk from the side gate to kitchen door. For this purpose gas piping takes up less room than any other kind of frame equally as durable. Grapevines make the best covering, since they are in leaf as early as anything else and stay green until very late. The first summer, however, quick growing vines should be planted with the grapes, so the arbor will be covered while the grapevines are growing. Ordinary running beans and lima beans planted at intervals of three weeks until midsummer will keep the arbor covered and supply the family table. If only shade, privacy and beauty are desired, nothing is better than the Japanese hop vine.

On a larger lot, a pergola is made wider than an ordinary arbor and of lumber crosspieces with either cedar posts or cement columns. A combination of vines which will give satisfactory results in a year or so are Red Rambler roses at opposite corners, with white climbing roses at the other two corners. A good white climber is the Rosa Wichuriana, or, if a pink rose is wanted, the Dorothy Perkins is very good.

Perhaps the most beautiful porch or window vine is the wild clematis, but it has a close rival in the climber called the Star of Bethlehem, whose delicate foliage and fragrant white blossoms more than compensate for its slow growth the first year or so. North of Mason and Dixon’s line it should be protected during the winter months.

Shaded corners which the rays of the sun seldom or never reach are apt to be given over to hopeless desolation. They need not be, for a basket of ferns from the woods, a pile of rocks or an old tree stump and good, rich, well pulverized earth will make a fernery which requires little attention beyond a plentiful supply of water every day.

Where the grounds are large enough to allow some freedom in planting, it is still best to have flowers in beds along the fence, near the house and as borders for walks and driveways, leaving the open
space for a lawn and a few trees. Flowering shrubs or those with beautiful foliage are valuable as screens for buildings which would otherwise be unsightly, and to hide from the public necessary household occupations, such as laundry work.

Nowadays, when nurserymen can transplant large trees successfully, it is not necessary to wait for years to have plenty of shade. It is, of course, more expensive to buy the large trees, and then it is always a pleasure to watch young trees grow and develop, especially when the price must be considered. Maples grow rapidly, symmetrically and give shade very soon. The brown-tailed moth is very fond of them, it is true, but he may be kept from the trees if attention is given to him as soon as he appears.

If residents of a street want to reach the highest state of civic improvement and at the same time enhance the value of their own and their neighbors’ property, let them remove all fences and permit the lawns to reach entirely to the sidewalk, which should have at its outer edge a border of grass. If such a street has large trees, elms and oaks particularly, it is a civic asset for the entire town. One of the most beautiful residence streets in America is Greene Street, in Augusta, Georgia. It is wide enough to have four rows of trees, one at the outer edge of the sidewalk on both sides of the street and a double row down the center of the street, with a grass plot in between. To walk down the path in the middle row underneath the elms, whose tall branches form the true Gothic arch, vistas of light and shade are seen whose beauty can never be forgotten.

A country place is at the same time easier and more difficult to improve than one in a town or village, easier because a freer hand may be used in its development, more difficult because the planting must be harmonious and conform to the lay of the land. Then a farm, no matter how small, should be self-contained, as far as possible, and there are so many needs to be provided for.

It is a fascinating thing, however, to take an old, run-down place, not too large, and bring order out of chaos. When I bought my own farm of fourteen acres two and a half years ago, the land had all been planted in corn and hay. The tiny four-roomed house appeared so dilapidated that I questioned if it would last until a new cottage could be built, which I did not think would happen for two or three years, and in the meantime I wanted to spend my summers there. My country neighbor assured me that, “it was an old house when I came here, an’ that was nigh fifty years ago, an’ it ain’t fell down yit, an’ ye know it’s good as long as it stan’s.” There was no gainsaying that, and as he refused to consider the possibility of col-
THE GARDEN AS A CIVIC ASSET

lapse, I concluded to follow his example and not hunt for trouble. Friends, members of the family and I have spent two summers there and apparently the little house is good for many more, for although put up by country carpenters, it was constructed before the days of "jerry building" and is more sound than it looks.

When I first saw it, the place’s only pretensions to beauty were some fine fruit trees, a pear tree and syringa bush on either side of the gate, meeting overhead in a very pretty arch, some small shrubs around the house and a lilac bush near the well, all in a state of neglect. The trees and shrubs we trimmed into some vestige of shape, the holes in the trunk of the lilac were cleaned out and my first attempt at tree surgery was made by filling the hollow with stones and cement. The experiment was perfectly successful, for the bush has taken on a new lease of life.

What had been a fine old Concord grapevine was trained on a broken-down fence in front of the house, about twelve feet from the porch, precisely where it hid the glimpse, between the distant trees, of the high road, a mile away. The fence we took down; as shade was needed for the porch, and it was not practicable to train vines on it, an arbor was erected and the grapevine pulled up over it toward the porch. The arbor was made of trees cut down in a neighboring wood. It had to be light and rustic to suit the surroundings. Cutting out the dead wood and trimming the vine improved it immensely, but it still did not reach the porch to give sufficient shade, which was needed quickly, so gourd vines were planted at the porch end of the arbor. They were highly successful, made rapid growth and gave dense shade. The delicate, crépy white flowers made a decided contrast to the large coarse leaves. As the petals fell, and the gourds matured, they formed fantastic shapes and hung down from the arbor as stockings hang from a Christmas tree.

The small ramshackle barn matched the house and was so near that we had to see it, whether we wanted to or not. In order that it might not be an eyesore, morning-glories, gourds and nasturtiums were planted around both sides, and sunflowers and cosmos at the ends, hiding all the bareness as completely as possible, leaving just space enough to open the doors; for garden tools, kerosene, and such things had to be kept within. The ambitious morning-glories and gourds climbed up to the top and down again on the opposite side. The nasturtiums were not so venturesome, but contented themselves with doing more thoroughly a work they found at hand. The barn had a partition in it with window openings, but no sash or blinds.

Of course, the little house had no bathroom and no space to give to one, so the small end of the barn was made into a place where
THE GARDEN AS A CIVIC ASSET

a bath could be had in tolerable comfort, even if it did not fall within the strict definition of a bathroom. A platform was made to cover half the original dirt floor; with a large tub, a white iron washstand, a large water can for cold and big pitchers for hot water, a good bath was quite possible. At first it was a puzzle to know what to do with the water afterward. The solution was a drain dug from just inside the barn underneath the side wall and out some distance into the field, making it only necessary to turn the tub on end and let the water flow out into the drain. The nasturtiums have not been lost sight of in this digression, however far off they may appear. The task they performed admirably was to grow over the bathroom, completely shielding the open window space; they even crept inside blossoming over tub and washstand, forming a natural curtain after their own plan. Nasturtiums deservedly rank high as flowers for house and garden, for we were never without a large bowl of them on the living room table, and the more we cut them the more they bloomed.

As I took up my abode at Pendidit, the name I gave the little farm, in the early spring when the roadside exhibited sharp bare lines, I planned to "improve" it by setting out a border of hardy perennials against the fence. As summer advanced, bringing the violets, daisies, queen’s lace and golden rod I had not the impertinence to make a single alteration. The passing weeks brought their own changes in color and the succession of natural wild flowers gave a variety which was a continual delight.

People who must buy the shipped vegetables of city markets do not know their real taste. This is especially true of sweet corn and lima beans. Of course, my first thought was about the garden which my neighbor had agreed to make for me. As soon as the ground was ready he plowed and harrowed an acre for the garden spot. When asked how much of a garden I intended to have, I replied that I thought half an acre would be big enough. "An' is that all? That ain't no garden 't all," so I then said an acre. Potatoes are the chief article of diet in the rural districts; their planting in spring, for the time being, engages the attention of farmers to the exclusion of all else. As the country people passed by on their way to and from the nearby town, they would stop and call out to know if "yer got yer pertaters in yit?" It was as much a topic of conversation as the opera is in the city, and the question was put in quite the same way as if it had been "Have you heard 'Salome' yet?" Naturally, my neighbor asked how many potatoes I expected to plant. By that time I had learned that he dealt with large quantities only, so I hazarded "a bushel." "No more'n that—why that
ain’t nawthin’". So I said two bushels, wondering if he could be
"conning" me for a "city greeny." He was not, but I suppose he
had never known anyone to plant as few potatoes as one bushel. That
first summer was a liberal education in gardening with this true son
of the soil as my instructor, although he did not know it.

The permanent garden spot is now at one side of the new house,
sheltered by it from the north winds and protected on the west by a
windbreak of shrubs and cedars. It therefore has an eastern and
southern exposure. The vegetables are planted in straight rows
and there is a strip reserved nearest the shrubbery for three hotbeds,
three by six feet each, which will be made in the fall.

It requires a little more trouble to grow really fine small fruits,
but it is quite expensive to get a place stocked with the best varieties
all at once. As it is not practicable for me to give up employment
in the city just yet, I have the time to wait for plants to multiply, so
last October I put out one hundred fine pot-grown strawberry plants.
When the runners are large enough this season, they will be pinched
off and made into pot-grown plants of my own, to be set out in the
fall, thus giving me a large berry patch by another year. The same
plan is followed with hardy English violets, which always find ready
market in New York City and Philadelphia. Pendidit is well lo-
cated between the two places.

A few raspberries, currants and cultivated blackberries were
planted in order to see which would thrive best on the soil. The
raspberries far outstripped the others, so this spring two hundred
additional plants will be put out. This method will give me a place
well stocked with fine fruit at far less cost than if I had tried to do
it all at once. Every spring and fall I intend to add a few new plants.
When I am ready to live in the country permanently, and it is the
only real life there is, my farm will have advanced a long way toward
self-support.