THE DECORATIVE GOURD

GROWING THE GOURD VINE FOR ORNAMENTAL AND PRACTICAL PURPOSES: BY E. E. WILLCOX

THE gourd vine is one of the most remarkable of horticultural growths. It will produce genuine freaks of nature, which retain their forms for generations if properly cared for. The product of the gourd vine is not only astonishingly interesting and varied in itself, but is capable of being applied to all sorts of useful and decorative purposes, adding immensely to the interest of its culture. As the fruits vary greatly in size and shape, even on the same vine, their decorative uses can be equally individual and distinctive.

Gourds should be planted in the same manner as pumpkins, watermelons, squashes and cucumbers, but never near them, for, being of the same family, they readily hybridize when grown in the same vicinity, and the fruit, under such circumstances, will speedily decay. The proper way to start the growth is to dig a hole at the base of the support, one and one-half feet deep and three feet in diameter, fill with well-rotted manure up to within four inches of the ground level, cover with three inches of soil, plant seeds, and cover with one inch of soil packed down. In northern climates it is well to start the seed within doors about the latter part of March. The seed should be planted in three-inch squares of upturned sod, the root end of the seed being placed down and covered to its length with soil. It should be transplanted when the warm weather is certain, and given plenty of sun exposure, training and tying the vine to an ample and strong support. Gourd vines are lusty climbers, growing a foot or more in twenty-four hours.

CHILDREN IN A GOURD "VINEYARD."

The large varieties should be tied to their support near the stem, while the large bottles and sugar-troughs must be supported underneath, as otherwise they will tear away from the vine during storms. Hercules clubs, dippers and all the long-necked varieties must hang clear of everything lest they chafe, which causes decay or an imperfect gourd. The fruit should never be distorted during its period of growth with the idea of obtaining a strange shape. Such products are unnatural and of no real interest. It is much more fascinating to hybridize, a work done partly by the plant-grower and partly by the bees. To accomplish this, freely flowering plants should be grown near the vine to be hybridized. The gourds should be grown in groups to secure good results, as the long-handled dipper with the novelty gourd, the short-handled dipper with the long-necked bottle, the Hercules club with the long serpent. Never plant

GOURDS SUITABLE FOR DIPPERS.
a Hercules club with a sugar-trough, for they are too widely separated and will either be late in fruiting or blast when partly formed. When the plants show signs of flowering, a miniature gourd before the buds burst is an indication of a female blossom. This will continue to develop if the bees, in their search for honey, have attacked sufficient male blossoms to gather enough pollen on their legs to bring about the fertilization of the female flower. If the flower develops the result is sure to be as strange and odd as can be desired.

When the fruit turns a light or yellowish color it has developed sufficiently to be saved. When frosts kill the vine, or moldy spots appear, the fruit may be cut off. The cuticle-like covering may then be scraped away with the edge of a spoon, and the gourd thoroughly washed with a rough cloth. It should then be placed in the sun to dry or subjected to artificial heat, the drying process, by either method, being of the utmost importance.

The gourds are now ready for decorative treatment. Only the best and most perfect specimens should be used. Take a bottle gourd and cut off its stem, and you have a flower vase; make a cut farther down, and you have a jardinère; another cut, and you have a bowl. Sugar-troughs can be put to many useful as well as ornamental purposes, such as jardinères, seed dishes and punch bowls, by cutting away a portion of the top; or they can be turned into drums by cutting away a quarter of the top and stretching a parchment over the aperture. Among many African tribes these drums have a practical utility. The green skin of a young goat is stretched over the aperture, drawn very tightly and all ed to dry thoroughly. Such drums yield a very penetrating sound when beaten, and are used as a wireless system of communication between separated tribes, each village having its trained drummers who will send these signals from hill to hill for several hundreds of miles.

The dipper gourds are the easiest to use, and permit of the most useful applications. They make beautiful long-stemmed flower vases.

By cutting out a third of the side and neatly sandpapering the edges a good dipper is made. Or if you want a megaphone, cut the bulb part in the middle, round the edges with sandpaper, use the upper part as a horn, and you will be surprised how audible your words will be at a considerable distance. The lower part that was cut off makes an attractive nut-bowl. No change is needed to transform this into a child's eating dish, save a spoon, and this can be formed from a spoon gourd, suitably cut.

A vase can be made by taking a long bottle gourd and supporting its bulb part by spoon gourds as legs. Miniature bottles can be transformed to salts and peppers by puncturing the stem and making a small aperture on the bottom, which should be closed with a cork. A whole tea set, in fact, can be made from the various varieties that anyone can grow easily.

When the gourds have been properly dried and cut to the desired shapes, they may be made still more decorative by the help of oil colors or pyrography. By the use of simple and appropriate designs and the right colors, very pleasing effects may be produced. A single band around the top of a bowl is often sufficient to relieve the plain surface, or a carefully traced pattern may be employed, interesting but not elaborate or ornate; something, perhaps, based on a leaf or flower design, or the suggestive lines or colors of an insect or a bird; anything, in short, that lends itself to the shape and purpose of the object it is to decorate.

If the gourds have turned black or rusty,
paint them to cover up their imperfections, for the beauty of their forms will still be preserved. In short, with taste and ingenuity a host of beautiful and useful objects can be made from this fruit.

Of the peculiar shapes in my collection the most singular is the hybrid resembling a golf stick. It is as perfect as though made mechanically. The fruit grew with a handle as straight as an arrow, with the bulb part curved, the whole measuring four feet in length. It is a novelty quite unknown to the Department of Agriculture at Washington. The drum-major’s stick comes next in novelty. Of smaller varieties, the most striking is the egg gourd. The small varieties, however, do not, as a rule, dry well. One of the interests of raising gourds is the discovery from time to time of new shapes for original uses.

GERMAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS RECOMMENDED FOR WISCONSIN

THE National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, 20 West 44th Street, New York City, has just made a general distribution of the very interesting Advance Sheets of the Report of the Wisconsin Commission upon Plans for the Extension of Industrial and Agricultural Training, recently submitted to the Governor of that state. The most noteworthy feature of the report is the recommendation with reference to the adaptation to Wisconsin conditions of the German system of compulsory Day-Continuation Schools. Under the German Imperial Law every State is allowed to establish Day-Continuation Schools in which attendance is required of all apprentices under 18 years of age. By the same law, employers are compelled to allow the apprentices the time necessary for attendance. In these schools the apprentices are instructed in a wide range of subjects bearing directly on their progress and efficiency in their trades.

The Report recommends the adoption of a law for Wisconsin making industrial training compulsory for all apprentices until the sixteenth year of their age, and also of a law setting the length of working day for all children under sixteen at eight hours.

Our readers will recall with interest the article on these German schools published in The Craftsman for March, 1911.

GAIN A YEAR BY SEEDING PERENNIALS IN JULY; BY ADELINE THAYER THOMSON

JULY is the most satisfactory month in the year for starting perennials from seed. While there is no mean advantage in the fact that the necessary work is easier and more safely accomplished in the quiet of midsummer than when attempted during the spring rush, the great argument in favor of July seeding is that it means the saving of a year’s time. The hardy plants raised from seed require the first season for root growth, and seldom blossom until the following season. Perennials sown next spring, therefore, will make no flower showing until a year from that time. But if the seed is planted in July, the young plants will be assured not only of growth sufficient to winter safely, but flowers for the yard this coming season.

Perennials have become so popular for outdoor planting schemes, and their merits are so well known, that arguments in their favor are superfluous. To grow these valuable plants from seed simplifies the problem of their expense so greatly that the simplest yard may present an exquisite display of hardy flowers, acquiring a perennial collection in a year’s time that many a buyer of individual varieties would be a lifetime in accumulating.

The three necessary factors to success in the midsummer raising of perennials from seed are as follows: Seeds must be procured from a reliable source, the seed-bed must occupy a shaded location, and the young plants must be kept moist. Regarding specific directions for planting, they are the same as for annuals—the ground well spaded and pulverized, the seeds sown thinly, to the depth of twice their size, in rows three inches apart, and each plant variety plainly marked. After planting, the ground should be carefully watered, and from the time the seedlings appear the soil should be kept moist. During intense heat, if the young plants seem wilting, it is wise to cover them with newspapers throughout the hottest part of the day.

Transplanting the seedlings when they have made their second pair of leaves will more than repay one for this extra trouble, in the increased growth and strength attained by the plants. At the approach of freezing weather the plants must be