A BACKYARD GARDEN: FROM JAPANESE INSPIRATION: BY T. H. PARKER

ONE of the problems that discourage the city dweller who longs for a flower garden, is the limited area in which he has to work. It hardly seems worth while to try to do anything with the small plot he calls his backyard, and usually he contents himself with a little lawn and a lawn mower. He is so accustomed to seeing things done on a large scale in this country that it seldom occurs to him that anything small is worth while. He may admire the large canvas of a master, but the exquisite art of the miniature is lost to him.

On the other hand the Japanese have learned the beauty of the miniature, and nowhere is this characteristic more evident than in their gardens. They have brought the art of miniature gardening to a high state of perfection and it is to them the despairing American gardener should turn if he would learn how to make the most of his little plot.

It was from the Japanese that a neighbor of mine learned a few lessons that enabled him to make his small backyard one of the most beautiful spots imaginable in the brief space of two years and at an unusually moderate outlay. He was for six years a resident of Japan, and there he studied his gardener's methods closely.

The largest expense in creating this Japanese garden was incurred in piping the water to the fountain and small hydrants. The trees, for the most part, were obtained from the woods, and all the flowers were common perennials, so that in this respect the expense was kept down to the minimum.

The plot in which this garden grows is 120 by 60 feet, and at the time the garden was begun it was nothing more than a sandy piece of ground, of such poor quality that even the grass had a hard struggle for existence. On one side was a neighbor's hen-coop; on an-
other, a tall telephone pole close up to the boundary line, and on the third side was a playground for boys where baseball was the favorite pastime.

Moreover, another unpleasing element was added in the form of a wire fence, for the first thing a city gardener must do is to guard his domain against mischievous boys, neighbor's hens and stray dogs and cats. All this, at the outset, produced a combination of inartistic surroundings that would be hard to beat, but they have been entirely blotted out, and the manner in which this was done is interesting.

First of all the plot was enclosed with a four-foot wire fence of strong, close-meshed wire to keep the intruders out. Of course this fence did not add any beauty to the garden-to-be, so the next step was to obliterate it, together with the nearby coop and telephone pole. This was done by planting a hedge of Siberian privet close to the fence, and in two years' time the fence was entirely concealed. Siberian privet was used because it winters better than California privet, which in New England is frequently winter-killed down to the roots. In setting out the hedge and in fact every tree, shrub and plant in the garden, good, rich earth was put in to replace the sandy soil.

In eliminating the coop and pole from the landscape, trees were planted close to the hedge at a point opposite the objectionable features, and in the case of the pole, quick-growing poplars were used. Then on the side next to the playground the wire fence was extended up to the height of ten feet to stop the ball from coming into the garden. This fence, too, is now hidden by two artistic trellises that support Japanese rambler roses, and some tall trees were transplanted to their present places close by with such care that their growth was scarcely retarded. One of these is a fine maple about four inches in diameter.

Thus on three sides of the garden the hedge and trees make a fine background of green and effectively conceal the boundaries of the yard. Many flowering shrubs are planted close to the hedge where there is room for them, and farther out in the
garden are the smaller varieties of flowers.

One of the most effective groups of trees is that of white birches, their slender white trunks making silvery tracery through the shiny green leaves. Pine trees work into the Japanese idea very readily and many are used.

Across the lower end of the garden, where two apple trees that were found growing in the yard have been adopted into the general plan, and where the shade is densest in summer, the hedge is reinforced with wild raspberry bushes. Here stately wild ferns flourished in profusion, and all they cost was the trouble of going into the woods and digging them up. In fact the feature of the whole garden is the number of native trees and plants that were obtained at little or no cost. There are some rare trees to be found in this garden, too, among them being a real Japanese pine, an imported Scotch pine and a weeping Japanese cherry to emphasize the Japanese effect.

Now for the flowers. These were selected with a view to having blooms from earliest spring until the frost comes. Moreover, perennials were used exclusively, except the asters which are planted for the purpose of providing flowers until frost time. By using perennials one avoids the labor of setting out new plants or sowing seeds every spring.

Just as soon as the snow disappears the crocuses in their different colors first light up the garden. Close behind them comes the beautiful moss verbena that carpets the margin of the miniature lake with its blossoms. And so on in succession follow the daffodils, narcissus and the tulips until the summer flowers take their places.

On the edge of a group of white birches a cluster of Oriental poppies blaze against the green background early in June; nearby the modest columbine swings its blue blossoms, and a little beyond foxglove and larkspur are budding in front of a row of hollyhocks, at this time a foot high. In another place lemon and salmon colored azaleas call attention to themselves by their vivid contrast. A small bronze beech forms an excellent background for some common, yellow lilies, and so on through the whole garden, each flower being placed with care to stand out in contrast with its neighbor.

So much for the basis of this garden. Now we come to the distinctively Japanese features. First one sees two little pools of irregular shape at the upper end of the yard near the house. They are directly in front of a veranda that is used for a living room in summer, and they...
form a refreshing spot for the eye when the midsummer sun is trying to burn up everything. The pool farther from the house, in which the fountain is located, is higher than the other and overflows into it, the little stream tumbling down over a miniature cascade. The lower pool drains into the sewer.

Each pool has a cement bottom to prevent seepage and is bordered with pieces of red sandstone of irregular size and shape. The edge of the higher pool is lined with iris of several varieties, even the simple wild iris finding a place beside the rarer Spanish. The lower pool is edged with moss verbena.

In the center of the higher pool is the fountain surrounded by foliage of wild rice and Japanese water-lilies that hide it in daylight. To conceal the fountain further the pipe and nozzle are made to represent a huge lotus flower.

Connecting the two pools is a tiny stream crossed by a small, arched Japanese bridge. Under the bridge is a small hydrant by means of which it is possible to get a flow of water over the little cascade without operating the fountain.

In each pool are water-hyacinths, water-lilies and the beautiful white lotus not commonly seen in this country. Both pools also contain goldfish of the ordinary and double-tailed Japanese variety, and frogs from no-one-knows-where have taken up their abode there. The fish and frogs keep the pools free of mosquitoes.

As the trees and flowers do not extend a great way out into the garden there is a good-sized bit of greensward in the center. In the lower left hand side of this plot and on a line drawn diagonally from the upper right-hand corner to the opposite corner, two torii, the familiar bird roosts of Japan, have been erected. These are usually found before the entrances to temples and are commonly thought to be intended for gateways, but they were originally perches for pheasants and other birds of beautiful plumage that were presented to the temple by worshipers and thereby became sacred birds. So the torii in this garden lead to a little temple with its idol, in the far corner surrounded by ferns.

In looking across the garden toward the little temple you get the impression that the place is a great deal larger than it really is. The vista through the torii and under the apple trees has a distance that is most deceptive. Winding among the trees, shrubs and flowers are little paths that one may follow in exploring the beauties of the place and these, too, give an idea of a larger space. In this respect it is true to the Japanese idea.

Such a garden has individuality and reflects the careful work that has developed it into such a success. It amply repays all the time and labor put into it and even in winter, when a blanket of snow covers everything, it gives pleasure by the anticipation of the coming spring.

SMALL WATER GARDENS

Few garden features give greater pleasure or require less attention than a water garden, and its construction can be as simple or as elaborate a process as desired. When the larger water-lilies are to be planted, one end of the basin should be dug to a depth of at least three feet (no artificial pond need be deeper no matter how large) and slope gradually to about eighteen inches. Such a sloping pond will suit the requirements of any aquatic plants. Puddled clay is generally sufficient for the smaller pools, though they can be lined with brick, stone or concrete if preferred.

If there is no natural flow of water from running brook or spring, water from a concealed hydrant will answer the purpose, provided a continuous flow can be maintained, enough to keep the inflow and outflow relatively even. A slight movement of the water keeps the pond from becoming stagnant and fresh water flowing in is necessary for the health of the plants. Soil can be put directly on the floor of the basin to the depth of about one foot, or boxes and tubs filled with earth holding plants of different species can be set in. The soil in either case should be a rich compost of loam and leaf mold.

Lotus, the various water-lilies, water-hyacinths and poppies, water-snowflakes; crowfoot, spearwort, plantain are all exceedingly lovely flowers that will bloom continuously with but little attention. At the margin of the pool iris, cardinal flower, forget-me-not, turtle head, mimulus can be planted, as well as the many varieties of ferns. Back of these can come the moisture loving shrubs such as azalea, dogwood, viscosa, laurel, magnolia.