HOW TO MAKE A CEMENT DRINKING AND BATHING BASIN FOR THE BIRDS: BY ADELINE THAYER THOMSON

If there is one way above others of making the home grounds a constant rendezvous for birds of many kinds, it is to furnish, in a settled place, a never failing supply of fresh water. The feathered songsters are great drinkers and revel in a cold water plunge seemingly as much as in the finding of a wriggling worm or fancy bug. And a yard, whether in the city or country, where water is always to be found in spite of heat and drought, in basins shallow enough for safe and easy bathing is a boon too greatly prized by the birds to escape notice for long, or when once found to remain unappropriated.

Bird basins fashioned of cement are unusually satisfactory and are very easily and inexpensively made. The main points of advantage over the earthenware crocks, pans, etc., commonly used in the modest yard, are that the cement basin is practically indestructible, it never rusts; it keeps the water refreshingly cool, and its surface is rough enough in texture to give the birds a safe and firm foothold when drinking and bathing.

The necessary materials for making a very neat and thoroughly practicable cement basin are: a cheap, wooden, oval chopping bowl to form the oval mold for the basin, measuring about 15 inches long, 9 inches wide and 4 inches deep; a coverless box, planed perfectly smooth, made of wood not less than ½ inch thick, and measuring 20 inches long, 12 inches wide and 6 inches deep. As this box furnishes the outside mold for the bird basin and must be taken apart when the cement within is dry, its sections should be fastened together with screws instead of nails, to guard against all danger of breaking the finished work. A piece of ½-inch gas-pipe is used to make an opening in the bottom of the basin to drain off the stagnant water, and the remaining requisites are oil, Portland cement, some sharp sand and gravel, such as is known to the trade as torpedo sand, a trowel, a screen for sifting and a wide board on which to mix the cement.

When all is in readiness, bore a hole through the bottom of the chopping bowl, the size of the gas-pipe, and after inserting the pipe treat this, together with the entire inside of the box and the outside of the chopping bowl to a liberal dressing of oil. The oil will prevent the cement from sticking to the mold at the time of removal. Now turn the box bottom side down on a table or other firm support presenting a flat surface that may be left undisturbed for a week. This done, place the chopping bowl, oval face down, in the center of the box. Now the hardest part of the work is over, for making the concrete is really no more difficult than mixing up a batch of mud pies, and quite as much fun. The recipe for the concrete is: one part Portland cement to one part gravel and one part sand. First sift the sand through the sieve, measuring the al-
olated part of this and the gravel secured by sifting, then blend them together on the mixing board with the same amount of cement. The thorough mixing of these dry materials is the secret of success in making the concrete. Add water to the mixture, stirring all the time, until the substance becomes pasty. This paste should not be thin and watery but stiff enough to require a moderate amount of tamping when filling it into the mold. Now put the cement in the box carefully that the chopping bowl may not be disturbed, until the box is filled up to the top. Then, after leveling off the cement perfectly even with the top of the box nothing remains but to allow the cement to harden undisturbed for a week. In case the weather is hot, however, it is a wise plan to pour over the cement a small pail of water once or twice during the week, to guard against all danger of cracking.

When the week has passed and the cement appears perfectly dry, remove the screws that unite the different sections of the box, and withdraw the sections carefully from about the cement; work the iron pipe loose, pull it out and fit a cork into the hole; then turn over the cement block and cautiously slip out the bowl,—and behold, the finished bird basin fashioned of cement!

Should the cement stick to the mold, it may be safely loosened by light quick tappings on the mold with a hammer; this, however, should be done most carefully, as if one had all the time in the world.

A bird basin of this style is extremely effective mounted on a rustic pedestal. A common cedar post, however, twined with vines, is also attractive.

The making of these bird drinking bowls would be a delightful vacation pastime for little children. It would open up for them the pleasures of craft work and at the same time awaken their friendship for the birds, a condition as valuable for the children as the birds.

The birds soon learn to know the children and will perch trustingly upon their hands, flutter around their shoulders, hovering over their heads, alighting occasionally among the ribbons and flowers of their hats as if enjoying the daring adventure of the game. They make the most delightful playmates for the children, unconsciouslly teaching them gentleness and thoughtfulness, quickening their faculties of observation. Even a very little child will notice a bird and watch with sweet wonder its swift flights in the air and quick, playful dashes across the lawn. The fluttering wings of a bird lead the child into fairylike lands of fancy and into the even more marvelous realm of visible nature, opening wide avenues of enjoyment.

A bird basin in a garden is also an endless source of pleasure to those children of a larger growth who have not lost their childlike sympathy for the flying, walking, blossoming things of the earth.

If tall hollyhocks grew all around it so that the smaller birds could alight upon the topmost buds and swing delightedly before flying to the basin for a drink or a bath, or sway upon the slender stalks as they sing songs of joy and gratitude after the refreshing drink, it would complete the birds' happiness and add to the beauty of the garden.