GARDENING AS A BY-PRODUCT: BY WALTER A. DYER

“Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens.”—Thomas Jefferson.

During the severe snow storms which tied up the railroads for a day or two early last March, an extraordinary condition of affairs developed in the Long Island village in which I live. There was a temporary shortage of milk, eggs, vegetables and fruit, because communication with New York was cut off. This, mind you, in the center of a community whose business it is to produce these things.

In the summer time, if I sit up late, or am wakeful, I can hear in the night the sound of great wagons and motor trucks going by the house. If I look out, I see that they are laden with produce from the truck gardens of Long Island, bound for the early morning markets of Brooklyn. On all sides of us are to be seen these market gardens and truck farms, but their products all go to the city, to be shipped back again by the wholesale produce dealers to our local grocers and fruit stores.

Here is an absurd result of the high organization of the city and the lack of organization in the country. For a hundred miles or more around, the country pays tribute to the city. Our neighbors sell in bulk to the metropolitan markets, and if we would eat we must needs buy back from the city at a higher price.

A moment’s reflection will show all this to be an economically unsound situation. I know that it obtains also in the vicinity of Boston and Philadelphia, and I believe that it holds true, in a modified degree, all over the country. And so long as our national life continues to revolve about our great cities, so long as we are organized according to a system of urban planets and satellites, this condition of affairs seems likely to continue.

Now there is just one way to beat this game, and that is to raise your own fruit and vegetables. Those of us who do this are not so entirely dependent on the city for our substance, and we are saved the galling realization that our dollar is buying only forty cents’ worth of food. We are tending toward a more normal social system; we are reducing the high cost of living for ourselves, and are doing our small part toward reducing that of the nation.

We cannot all be farmers. Some of us must be doctors, storekeepers, barbers, dressmakers—or commuters. But that need not prevent us from being first-hand producers on a small scale—partners in the creation of fundamental national wealth. We can become leisure-hour farmers in the backyard or the vacant lot. We can make farming a by-product of our activities—an avocation.
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The benefits to be derived from the personal cultivation of the small parcel of land at the disposal of the average man are manifold. First, there is the actual saving in money—the reduction of the family’s cost of living.

How far the individual may care to make a business proposition of his backyard farming is a matter of personal preference. It is doubtless true that most of us do not make our gardens pay in dollars and cents. I know that mine, builted as it is upon gravel and ashes, has cost me more than I have gotten out of it in money value. I have drawn my dividends rather in the form of health, pleasure, independence and the supreme satisfaction of eating vegetables fresh picked from my own garden, a joy that money cannot buy.

I mention this for fear some critic may call me a theorizer and demand my figures. As a matter of fact, the garden can be made to pay in cold cash. I know of a man in New York State who for years has supported himself and his family on three acres, employing intensive methods, with strawberries as a staple. There are many instances on record of smaller gardens or backyard farms that have paid in proportion. The experiences of several such gardeners are given in full by Mr. E. L. D. Seymour in his book, “Garden Profits.”

One woman, on a plot fifty by thirty feet, working an average of ten minutes a day, raised enough vegetables to supply her table all summer, and carrots and parsley for winter. She estimated the value of these vegetables at twelve dollars and fifty-five cents, market prices. Her cash expenditure was one dollar for seeds.

A business man, whose hours for gardening were before eight in the morning and after five in the afternoon, supplied his family of four with fresh vegetables from a plot of five hundred and forty square feet. These vegetables he valued at fourteen dollars and fifty-two cents, and his cash outlay was one dollar and fifteen cents.

In a city backyard a garden was established on the most unpromising soil, measuring twenty-eight by twenty-eight feet. The first season was only moderately successful, but the second year nearly enough fresh vegetables were raised to supply a family varying from three to six members, from May to November, and with celery and squash in December. A few strawberries and currants were also raised, and a wealth of flowers. The salable products were worth thirty-three dollars and fifty-two cents.

One busy woman, on a plot forty-six by thirty feet, supplied her family all summer with fresh vegetables, and with parsnips and
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cucumber pickles in the winter, besides flowers. She was obliged to hire the heavy work done, and her expenditure was about ten dollars.

On a city backyard, twenty-five by twenty-five feet, two hundred and fifty pounds of tomatoes were grown, worth about fifty dollars.

One family, working one-tenth of an acre, raised a summer supply of vegetables and fifteen cans of rhubarb for winter, valued at fifty-one dollars and fifty-nine cents, with an expenditure of seven dollars and seventy-two cents.

A fourteen-year-old boy cultivated half an acre as a business proposition. He sold his vegetables for seventy-one dollars and fifty-two cents. His expenses were twenty-one dollars and seventy-eight cents for seed, fertilizer, etc., and his net profit forty-nine dollars and seventy-four cents.

Vegetables estimated at one hundred dollars' value were grown on a plot two hundred by seventy feet, of which ten dollars' worth were sold and the rest supplied a large family practically the whole year. Two other gardeners estimated one hundred dollars' worth grown on plats one hundred and twenty-five by seventy-five feet and one hundred by eighty feet respectively.

An unsightly backyard was cleared up and a ravine filled with ashes, top soil and manure. On this vegetables were grown as well as flower plants for spring sale. The gross income was one hundred and thirteen dollars and fifty cents; the outlay for seeds, three dollars and fifty cents.

Instances of this sort could be multiplied indefinitely. Conditions vary, of course, and with them the opportunities for profit. And a good deal depends on the skill and science of the gardener. Intensive cultivation and the studious feeding of the soil are desiderata. A garden plan should be carefully worked out according to some good garden manual, and the rules of the best authorities followed in planting. Conscientious cultivation and weeding during the summer and the following of an early crop with a later one are keys to success. Finally, the woman of the house can help materially by learning how to can peas, beans, etc., and so extend the garden's usefulness into the winter months.

Now all of these things can be accomplished, to a greater or less degree, by any intelligent man or woman who is not lazy. Gardening is a matter rather of application than of superior ability. But it is no undertaking for the fainthearted or the squeamish. Patience and optimism, with a kindly feeling for the good brown earth, are the true gardener's virtues. And for the happy folk who practise them the rewards are sure.
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MONG the benefits of backyard farming may be mentioned its educative value both to adults and to children. Agriculture is a science worthy of the attention of the most advanced "high-brow" or the most hardened man of business. One cannot be truly cultured who knows nothing about the things that grow out of the earth, who has no knowledge of the oldest and most honorable profession in the world. A man may engage in the study of the soil all his life and never get at the bottom of it.

And think of the benefit to the children who grow up to become familiar with these things; their hands and minds trained in normal, wholesome ways. That child acquires self-confidence and self-mastery who is encouraged to carry his garden through from seed-time to harvest. To him is vouchsafed an early vision of the earth and its basic source of wealth. He is establishing the best possible source of good citizenship and future usefulness. Better keep a child out of school than deprive him of the education of gardening.

And as we grow older the backyard farm means even more to us. It knits the whole family together in a normal kinship of interest and actual profit. It forms the basis of the home, economically and socially. It makes the women who take part in it producers in partnership with their men folk. It glorifies the ideal of honest toil for all.

The man who gardens learns philosophy, patience. He has at his hand a constant relaxation for his leisure hours—an absorbing occupation; for no man can work in his garden whole-heartedly and dwell on business worries at the same time. Gardening is balm for fretted nerves, a health-bringing recreation, a lure to the fresh air and the out of doors.

I am unable to conceive of any occupation, in fact, in which health and utility and pleasure are so completely combined as in tilling the soil, and I am convinced that it has deep and far-reaching effects and always had. Fads, hatred, unrest, extravagances of all sorts are the outgrowth of the fevered, artificial and over-organized life of the cities; your yeoman has always been liberty-loving but conservative, for his roots strike deep into the land.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God." And again, "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens."

A similar vision appeared to Abraham Lincoln, writing in eighteen hundred and fifty-nine. "The old general rule," said he, "was that educated people did not perform manual labor. They managed to eat their bread, leaving the toil of producing it to the uneducated. This was not an insupportable evil to the working bees, so long as
the class of drones remained very small. But now, especially in these free States, nearly all are educated—quite too nearly all to leave the labor of the uneducated in any wise adequate to the support of the whole. It follows from this that henceforth educated people must labor. Otherwise, education itself would become a positive and intollerable evil. No country can sustain in idleness more than a small percentage of its numbers. The great majority must labor at something productive. From these premises the problem springs, 'How can labor and education be most satisfactorily combined?'

No other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought as agriculture.

I care not whether a man possesses a thousand acres or rents a thousand square feet; the principle is the same. If not a farmer by profession, let him become a little farmer by avocation. The profit will be both his and his children’s and the nation’s.

A S for the man who tills his little glebe there is the unending satisfaction of accomplishment. In his own garden he is a free being, independent of kings and of corporations. He is God’s co-partner in making the earth to bring forth fruit. And when old age comes and he is compelled to retire from the activities of a lifetime, to leave his place in the ranks to be filled by a younger man, he is not one of those restless old misanthropes, shambling uselessly through his latter years. He has a worthy occupation for his old hands until his body is laid under the flowers that he loved.

But my mind reverts continually to the economic value of the backyard farm. Just suppose that one family in ten in the United States should start a new garden this spring. If these gardens averaged fifty by forty feet only, or approximately one-twentieth of an acre, that would mean the addition of some one hundred thousand cultivated and productive acres to our national resources. More than that, these acres would be above the average in productiveness, for they would be cultivated intensively. The high-cost-of-living bogie would come tumbling from his pedestal in a single season.

A further great benefit would be gained if our farmers were better gardeners. My neighbors in the Massachusetts hills, where I have my farm, are but indifferent gardeners. In our whole neighborhood there are but two gardens worthy of the name. Our nearest neighbors, with a large family and enough hands to make work light, buy canned goods all winter. Instead they might easily raise enough and to spare. If all such farmers would but consider their gardens as their greatest assets, the bogie would receive another jolt.
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A garden for every family, and every family in a garden—that is an ideal worth aiming at. How many national, economic and social ills might thus be cured! It would help to break up our city-ridden system. It would establish even our city-working families on the land. It would bring back the love of independence to a groping people. It would establish a sounder, healthier, more normal life for this fertile land of ours. It would make our communities more nearly self-sustaining and so tend toward a better community life.

This may sound like the rhapsody of a dreamer, or the hawking of a nostrum vendor. I believe that is because our ears have become deafened by the cries of socialistic agitators. In the last analysis, the happiness and prosperity of the nation, of mankind, can come only through the prosperity and happiness of its liberty-loving individuals, and of this our formula holds out the hope.

"Population must increase rapidly," said Lincoln, "more rapidly than in former times, and ere long the most valuable of all arts will be the art of deriving a comfortable subsistence from the smallest area of soil. No community whose every member possesses this art can ever be the victim of oppression in any of its forms. Such a community will be alike independent of crowned kings, money kings, land kings."

Thus spake the man with a vision.

THE OLD WHITTLER: A STORY: BY CHARLES HOWARD SHINN

WHEN I first knew him he was still quite hale and hearty, although past seventy-five years old. His name was Mabury, but every one called him "The Major," so straight he stood, so keenly his gray eyes shone out on the world, so military was his trim white moustache, so clean his Sunday coat.

The Major, as he said, had once had a family. "Nobody ever had a better one," but wife and daughters were lying side by side in a far-off urban cemetery, and one boy was forever lost sight of in some needless skirmish on savage frontiers. The other sons, who had families of their own, wrote now and then, and sent what they could spare to "keep the pot boiling on the hearth."

So the old man lived alone, without the slightest sense of loneliness, in his little two-room cabin by a spring, under an oak tree on a Californian hillside. He kept everything "as neat as a pin," both outside and inside, from the one rose-bush at the front gate to the