EW city people realize that they live in a big fruit orchard. This is because the trees are so widely scattered. But the trees are there in large numbers, nevertheless. Let us take as an example a city of two hundred thousand people. This would give us approximately forty thousand homes. I venture that a horticultural survey would show an average of one fruit tree to every other home, making twenty thousand trees in all. Some rough estimates I have made, based upon limited investigation, warrant such a conclusion.

True, there are a great many homes—possibly whole blocks of them—which have not a single tree, but in many backyards you will find a half-dozen or more. Workingmen when they acquire homes are great tree-planters. In a city of the size herein considered there would be thousands of such homes.

Ordinarily a fruit tree is an unobtrusive object. Its presence about the premises is easily overlooked by a casual observer. In blossom-time, however, this is changed. Every tree forces itself upon the attention. A ride about a city at this period gives astonishing evidence of the number of trees, and there is often surprise as to location. Massed effects in the residence districts are common, and banners of white or pink will have been flung out also where not expected, as in small downtown yards and barren, congested factory neighborhoods.

Taking my tentative figures as a basis, let us look at the matter further. A fruit-grower friend of mine lately gave me some statistics: On a one hundred-acre orchard now approaching the bearing period he planted two thousand seven hundred apple trees, one thousand six hundred and fifty peach trees and two hundred pear trees, making a total of four thousand five hundred and fifty trees. With the best results in view, the acreage would not permit of a greater number of apple trees, as they must be a certain distance apart, but fillers of peach and pear trees were allowed. Hence the mixed orchard.

Our city orchard, if the trees were grouped according to horticultural science, would consist of over four hundred acres. What would be regarded as a marvel in such form really exists in a scattered way within the limits of the city. The orchard man referred to expects to realize in a normal year on apples, when the trees have reached maturity, a net profit of twenty thousand dollars. This is not mere conjecture. He counts on duplicating what another orchard of the same size has been doing, in the same general locality and under practically similar conditions. In figuring on the profit of
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his apple crop he first makes allowance for interest on investment in the orchard and in packing and storage plant, and for all expense of upkeep. No account is made in this estimate for the peach and pear yield, but he expects the former to be very profitable in a good season.

To be sure, fruit trees in a city could not be expected to do as well as those under scientific cultivation. Yet the bearing qualities and stamina of the city fruit tree, under unfavorable circumstances, are often remarkable. In the little yard of one of my neighbors is a pear tree of an excellent winter variety which seldom misses a bounteous yield. This past season its branches had to be propped to keep them from breaking under the load of fruit, and the family had more pears than they cared to use. Near it, is a one-sided, frail-looking peach tree, which with half a chance in the way of weather, yields a bushel or more of as good peaches as are offered at many of the market stands. A third tree of the same lot is a fine large cherry. It blossoms prodigiously, but its yield is always scanty. In another lot close at hand are several large cherry trees that blaze with fruit nearly every season. The owner has cherries to sell. To my positive knowledge, not one of the trees I have mentioned receives any care in the way of pruning or spraying. Such instances can be multiplied in almost any residence district.

Coming back to statistics again, speculatively, I estimate that my four hundred acres of city orchard will easily give a yield to the annual value of one hundred thousand dollars, in spite of neglect and handicap of environment, and making allowance for off years. I can not in this space go into detail as to how I get my figures, but I consider them very conservative.

We are not through yet with the city fruit question. There is a big vineyard to take into account. It would be wild guesswork to attempt an estimate of its size. That it is an immense one, though, is beyond doubt. Visit the backyards of any residence locality and note what a large proportion have grapearbors. Once get a good stand of grapes and you have something that usually stays with you, regardless of ill treatment. I have in mind a certain grape-arbor that was shiftlessly allowed to go to wreck. The vines have been forced to look out for themselves. They cling about the ruins of the framework that formerly supported them, and reach up into the branches of a near-by tree. This past season the ungrateful owner had so many grapes that he did not know what to do with them. From the money standpoint the grape yield of the city must run up into big figures. There is no need for waste. Such
portion of the crop as is not needed for other purposes can be
made up into a healthful and delightful beverage.

A great deal might be said about the part the city fruit yield
plays in the cost of living, and to what further extent it might be
made to cut down household expenses. But although the financial
phase has been touched upon, that is not the highest consideration.
A fruit-bearing plant, whether a tree or vine, is doubly interesting.
In addition to the processes of budding and putting forth its leaves
and distinctive blossom—a process shared with other shrubbery—
it exemplifies a still more fascinating phenomenon, that of growing
food for man.

It is a privilege to coöperate with nature in this beneficent form
by adding in a small way to the means through which such blessing
finds expression, and to aid in making her gifts as perfect as possible.
Aside from the satisfaction we may feel in helping to contribute a
mite to the food supply of the world, through the planting and care of
trees and vines, there is a peculiar pleasure in eating of the fruits
of our own growing, and sharing them with our neighbors. With a
glow of pride we exclaim at perhaps some festal event, “These canned
peaches are from our own tree.” Our guests share the spirit of our
satisfaction. What added grateful qualities there are in a bottle of
wine we take into a sick neighbor if we are able to say that the grapes
were home-grown.

The possibilities of growing fine fruit in a backyard, of making
trees and vines prolific, of circumventing such enemies as the insect
and the small boy, and various other phases of the matter, have been
demonstrated with a high degree of success in my own experience.

If this were the place, I might go into methods, but principles
of backyard horticulture are available to everyone in the form of
inexpensive literature. State experimental stations are always ready
to give valuable information for the asking. In case you have never
developed interest in the care of a few trees and vines on your own
premises, even though you live in a city and have small ground space,
you have missed a real pleasure.