CHAPTER IX
COMMUNITY GARDENING

Putting "Slacker Lands" to Work

AMERICAN war gardening, like every other development in life, has gone through a process of evolution. Because the exigencies of the situation necessitated haste, that evolution has been rapid. Contending with the most wonderfully organized force the world has ever seen, it was necessary, since so much depended upon the American war garden, to apply to it the principle of the best organization, and to unify it in order to strengthen it. As a result there speedily came into existence the community garden.

Many are the advantages gained through community gardening. To begin with, community gardening is practically the only method by which all available garden space can be put to work. Genuine community gardening, where all available lands are surveyed and allotted to gardeners, hardly falls short of land conscription. Community gardening played no small part in helping to win the recent war. To get enough food to win, the Allied peoples had to utilize every possible garden spot. In America back-yard areas were readily worked by patriotic owners. The enormous areas of "slacker lands," idle, vacant town lots, could not be put to work without considerable difficulty.

At the very least, the owner's permission had to be
secured before a lot could be farmed; and the average man was either too diffident or too lacking in initiative to secure such permission. On the other hand, the average lot-owner did not care to be repeatedly annoyed by requests from various individuals for the use of his idle lands. Both of these difficulties were obviated through real community gardening. The lot-owner dealt with known, responsible representatives of the gardening organization and had to give his consent but once; while the would-be gardener, far from having to seek a plot, was assisted to find one.

Community gardening is also important in that it effects a saving of labor. In preparing the land, for instance, a team of horses or a tractor can plow a large number of gardens in one day. Where the ground is in large plots, a team can readily prepare one acre in a day. One acre will contain slightly more than twenty-one gardens each forty by fifty feet—a good size for a family plot. By plowing the tract with a team, the cost to each of the twenty-one gardeners is small. To dig by hand a plot forty by fifty feet, particularly if manure is to be turned under, requires many hours of hard labor. If the gardener has at his command for gardening no time other than the after-work hours of the evening, it will take him several days merely to get his seed-bed prepared.

Again, when a group of people are together cultivating a large plot of land, they can often purchase their supplies, including fertilizer, implements, and seed, at wholesale rates, and thus effect a considerable financial
PLANTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

Jackson Heights, New York, a community of 600 families, all residents of apartment houses, contributed 200 gardens to the war-garden campaign of 1918. Here a group of gardeners are seen preparing the land which has been divided into individual plots, each measuring twenty by fifty feet. Joint arrangements were made for watering; jointly owned sprayers were used to fight insects and blight; and a "vigilance committee" which included all the gardeners took turns in protecting the plots from petty thefts and depredations.
saving. One implement will often serve for two or more gardeners, the gardeners arranging to use it at different times. Employés of factories who have worked together in this way have found the community system of much benefit. Other groups too have found it equally helpful.

Community gardening also makes it possible for expert supervision to be provided. A group of scattered individuals would probably find it difficult to engage the services of a skilled gardener to help them in their planting and cultivating. At slight expense to each person involved, a community group of gardeners can employ some expert to look over their gardens once or twice a week, or as often as is found necessary, and to guide them in all problems of cultivation.

Some groups of community gardeners may be fortunate enough to have among them a man trained in gardening, who is willing to give them the benefit of his experience without charge. In other cases it may be necessary to pay the supervisor in some way for his instruction. In any event, whether the community group possesses a trained gardener or not, all the members will be able to gain a certain amount of benefit from the experiences of their fellows. Each will possess some bit of information which will be helpful to the others.

Another gain to the community workers is the friendly rivalry which is aroused by close contact with fellow food producers. Each acts as a pacemaker to the others. Each strives to make his plot "the best." He begins by aiming to keep his garden freer from weeds
than his neighbor's. This means that he gives it better and more intensive cultivation and in so doing he is certain to increase his yield.

"Well, John, how many bushels of potatoes do you expect to get off your lot?" is the question which one gardener asks of his side-partner.

"Oh, I think I'll have five bushels," is the reply.

"Well, I'll bet you a good cigar that I beat you by a bushel," is the friendly banter.

"You're on!" And so it goes.

Each of them turns to and digs a little harder than he did before. Then darkness overtaking them, they walk home together discussing the ways of bugs and the wherefore of wilt and blight.

The value of such good-natured encouragement and cheer is not to be taken lightly. Always this marching forward together, with a brother's hand on the shoulder, has made the work of life easier and has added to the output of the workers.

In community gardening the question of organization is always an important one to be considered. This is true no matter what the size of the undertaking, whether it includes the working out of plans for an entire city or for a single group of workers in one large plot. In starting a new enterprise of this sort it must be known how much land is available for cultivation, the location and character of the land, the kind and quantity of manures and fertilizers readily procurable, what skilled directors can be secured, and the probable number of gardeners.
BOY SCOUTS RAISED THE FOOD

The menu of the luncheon given by the Kiwanis Club of Marion, Indiana, to celebrate the city’s achievements in a war-garden way, was made up almost exclusively of products grown by the Boy Scouts and newsboys in their plot. Most of the decorations, too, came from the gardens.
When the problem is being worked out, whether for the first time or for a realignment of forces and apportionment, an inventory of the town's gardening resources should be taken. A survey for this purpose can be made by existing agencies, or a special force or committee can be appointed for the purpose. A complete community survey in a town should include all lands within the district, private yards as well as vacant lots. The Chamber of Commerce, the Board of Trade, or the Civic Club is naturally the nucleus for such an effort; but the school board or a church or political club can conduct the work just as effectively. The local Council of Defense, the Mayor's War Committee or a similar organization should help. Through these agencies communities in all parts of the United States were intensively organized for the war-garden campaign conducted in 1917 and again in 1918.

When it is known that there is such united effort back of a movement, it gains in strength and prestige and there is greater stimulus to the individual worker. People will enter with more vim and enthusiasm into a task which has the backing and support of all their fellow-townsmen. Public meetings should be held to enlist interest and to secure more general coöperation. At these meetings there should be addresses by some of the leaders in community thought, in addition to discussion of the work by those who are more directly concerned with its operation and guidance.

In making a survey of the available garden space in a city or town, there are certain well-established meth-
ods of procedure which have been found most helpful. Survey forces should be selected, one for each district in the community. Each should have a leader and assistants. In many successful surveys these forces have consisted of senior classes in high schools, of Sunday school classes, of troops of older Boy Scouts, or of other boys. A certain day was selected for the work and this fact well advertised through the newspapers and by announcement in other ways. Large-scale maps showing the different parcels of land simplified the work. Each leader, with his assistants, was made responsible for a certain district. Then cards were prepared for the information as gathered. On these cards questions similar to the following were printed:

1. Name, address, and telephone number of landowner.
2. Whether land is a back yard or vacant lot.
3. Location of plot.
4. Approximate area in square feet.
5. Condition of the plot.
6. Whether owner will cultivate it or rent or lend it.
7. On what terms and conditions owner will rent or lend.

Other inquiries as to the amount of fertilizer available at different points, the quantity of seed likely to be required, also the demand for tools and other supplies, usually are made at the same time. With all these cards filled out and arranged alphabetically, the committee is in possession of a complete and comprehensive survey of all the garden space available in the
"PAPA, SEE ME HOE?"

With the children to inspire and help them in many instances, employees of industrial and manufacturing concerns all over the United States tilled and cultivated their individual and community gardens. Large tracts of land were divided into small plots. These are a group of such workers at the General Electric Company, Schenectady, New York, which gave to its men for garden purposes a large piece of river-bottom land which previously had grown nothing but weeds and marsh grass.
community. Meantime, the committee can receive applications from those desiring gardens, and assign convenient plots as soon as arrangements can be made with the owners. Thus it is possible, with comparatively little difficulty, to provide for the working of every foot of available garden land in the community.

In the gardening itself there should likewise be coöper- ation. In every town may be found retired farmers or experienced truck growers or a county agricultural agent; and arrangements should be made with some such trained worker to give advice and instruction as to selecting the crops best suited to the soil and as to the details of planting and cultivation. Where such individual is not available, sometimes it is desirable to raise a fund that may be used to hire a garden expert to supervise the work. Where possible, the cost of supervision should be borne from a general fund raised by the organization in charge. If this is not practicable, the individual gardeners should pay it in proportion to the size of their plots. The supervision should extend over the entire gardening season.

A group of gardeners should be organized just as any other association is organized, with its executive head and its directing committees. Various problems are bound to come up each season, and these can be handled better through committees than if the in- dividuals themselves or a few of them attempt to solve them. The executive head should have general super- vision of the work and for this reason should be, if possible, some person who is familiar with gardening.
Committees should arrange for purchasing seed, fertilizers, and other necessary supplies for the entire group. This coöperative spirit will save time and money to all concerned and will bring better results. Reduced rates usually can be secured when garden supplies of any sort are bought in considerable quantities.

In dividing a large tract into a number of individual plots, it should be remembered that an average size of forty by sixty feet is about as much as is needed for one family. This should give an ample supply of vegetables not only for summer use but to provide a surplus for canning and drying purposes and for winter storage. After a large piece of land has been divided and allotted, it must be understood that for garden purposes the lot assigned is the property of the person or family to whom it was given, and it should be protected as such. Each plot should be numbered. In assigning plots the fairest way is by drawing numbers.

As a specific instance of organized community gardening, the story of garden production in Marshalltown, Iowa, in 1918, is of interest. Marshalltown is a city of approximately 20,000 people. Mayor S. H. Reilly, sensing the crisis in the food situation, called upon the county agricultural agent to determine the amount of space within the city that could be put into gardens. The county agent's survey revealed a fine farm within the city limits, for the aggregate area of the unused vacant lots which could be put to work exceeded seventy-five acres. The county agent found, moreover, 300 tons of stable manure suitable for fer-
RAISING “FOOD P. O. B. THE FACTORY DOOR”

While the smoking stacks indicated that the manufacturing plants were busy turning out the ammunition needed to win the war, the industrial workers were also turning vacant tracts of land into food “munition plants.” This scene at the General Electric Company’s works at Schenectady, New York, shows land being prepared for the men, more than 1,500 of whom planted gardens on the area provided them for this purpose.
tilizer which was going to waste. This was enough to provide four tons for each acre. The survey completed, arrangements were speedily made with the owners whereby the unused lands could be put to work.

The county agent's survey also revealed things other than land and fertilizer. He discovered that many 1917 gardens had been failures because the gardeners were ignorant of agricultural principles. They had tried to raise vegetables in soil not suited to them, and they did not understand cultural methods. Among the residents of Marshalltown were a number of retired farmers. Like Cincinnatus, called from his plow to become a public servant, these farmers were called from their retirement by the Mayor and drafted for public service. They were made garden supervisors for the city. Each was appointed to oversee the work in several blocks and to make sure that the gardens were properly planted and well cared for. In order that seeds might be assured to rich and poor alike, a public subscription was taken to provide money for their purchase. Thus Marshalltown's gardens, like Mrs. Fuzziwig's smile, were both vast and substantial.

To organized community effort was due a large part of the success of the war-garden movement in the United States. Without such help it is certain that the city farming plan never could have attained the overwhelming success with which it has met. The generous thanks of the nation are due the loyal and self-sacrificing local committees and associations which gave of their time and their energy to carrying through the plans which
resulted in popularizing home gardening. War-garden associations were created to arouse people to the need of the work, to get them started, and to give them guidance and assistance as they proceeded. The coöperation in this community effort came from many sources. Officials of all sorts, almost without exception, gave the movement their endorsement and support and frequently served on the committees while prominent individuals showed equal patriotism in their desire to see vegetables grow where none had grown before.

That the war-garden associations thus formed will be permanent bodies, or continue as committees of the local chambers of commerce, boards of trade, or other bodies, is assured. So excellent has been the work accomplished in this organized way that community effort to aid home food production must continue. With the knowledge and experience already gained, these local committees should become more and more a factor in helping to solve food problems as they arise. Their purpose and their power doubtless will expand; and they will become community centers serving for the discussion and initiation of other methods of food production.