PLANNING AND PLANTING HOME GROUNDS.

There are few objects in a country landscape, that give such an idea of permanence, beauty, and well to-do comfort, as a thrifty, well kept orchard. It not only does much for the pocketbook of the farmer, but adds to the appearance of the farm. A man who has a fruitful orchard does not move every six months, or go to the Klondike or Cripple Creek, whenever the fever strikes him. The beauty of an orchard at all times of the year is appreciated, more or less, by every one, and its neat and trim order gives the owner as good a name as a well kept house and lawn. And of course we all say it is more essential to the farmer’s success. But “The beautiful is as useful as the useful,” as the poet has it. And no one can tell how useful a beautiful lawn and home grounds are to the owner.

It is in the reach of almost every property owner to make his place a pleasant spot and add to its homelike appearance in some way or another. Just how this can be accomplished is a problem to be worked out separately. No fixed and rigid rules can be given for its doing. What would make one place might spoil another. But every one can do something towards improving the looks of the home by the use of growing plants. If one cannot afford to buy the more expensive nursery stock, there are the native plants of the woods to fall back upon. The utility of collected natives in landscape work is little appreciated. Many shrubs are classed as brush by the average person, and accordingly grubbed out as weeds. But, if notice were taken of them at various seasons and their peculiarities studied, there would be very few but what would be desirable, if used rightly.

To improve home surroundings, it is necessary at the beginning, to have a definite aim and purpose. Utility and convenience ought to have first place, then desirability. To shut out objectional views, to give shade and seclusion to the home, to soften the straight lines of the house, and make it a thing of beauty, these are some of the objects to be sought for. But the greatest difficulty to the average owner, is to know what to do
and how to do it. This requires much thought and use of good judgment on his part.

First of all, comes the selection of the house site. It should not be close to the street, to avoid dust and noise. If the grounds are of large extent, a central location is desirable. On small lots, however, the general building line on the street, governs its distance from it. The barn and outbuildings are usually convenient to the entrance at the back or side of the house, in a position not conspicuous to the passerby. The buildings should be set according to the street grade, just a little above to obtain good drainage, and still not too high to avoid expensive grading and steep entrances.

When the house site is located and the buildings erected, then arrangement needs attention. A ground plan or sketch of the place is oftentimes a help, as many details are overlooked without it, and then a record may be kept.

On most home places, the simplest is best. That means as large a lawn as possible, gently sloping away from the house in all directions, especially towards the street. The soil should be as good as possible, and if standing water is present, drains are necessary. Of course, in finishing a level, even surface is desirable. But if the grounds are more extensive, or more varied in character, different treatment is necessary. Any natural features should be taken advantage of. A natural ledge, a tree-covered knoll, a little valley, filled with woodland plants, a small brook, or pond, would add much to looks and interest. Then too, it is more economical, as grading is expensive. In fact, there are few natural features that cannot be utilized in some way or other. Of course, this does not mean, leaving a wet bog or, ragged pile of boulders, but simply using the materials at hand. Many times expensive construction work is thus avoided. The mistake is often made in obtaining the monotonous even surface of a park, where an interesting variety in lawn and meadow, hill and dale, is possible.

The entrances, both walks and drives, should be on as easy grades as possible throughout their length. Flat roads do not drain well, while steep ones mean hard hauling, so both extremes should be avoided. A road, dropping five feet in a hundred of
its length, is usually as steep as practicable. Walks can be made steeper than this if needful. They should be arranged so as not to cross the lawn if possible, at least if the lawn is large. Therefore they should be at its side or back. Generally, on small places, a straight walk direct to the door is best. But on more extensive grounds, a curved drive or walk is often desirable to avoid a large tree, a ledge, or natural obstruction or to obtain a more level entrance. Usually a curving drive around a hill is better than a straight one over it. But aimless curves are to be avoided. If there are teams kept on the place, a turn or loop is necessary near the barn. This would be included in the back or working portion of the grounds.

The next thing to decide is the subdivision of the grounds. The extent and place required for the lawn, for both the flower and vegetable gardens, and for the working portion of the grounds, that is the storage and laundry yards, all, these need due amount of thought and judgment. The lawn, as a rule, is around the front and sides of the house toward the street. If it is the custom in the neighborhood to remove the front fences, then this lawn will be continuous along the street fronts. It should be as free from walks, drives, single shrubs, and showy flower beds as possible for a broad expanse of turf to give an idea of size and breadth. While the lawn ought to be as large as possible, still its size ought not to make its care a burden. On the farm, division fences or hedges are often desirable to keep animals off it. If the lawn in front is of good size, a small lawn at the side, usually between the houses, may be screened off by a hedge or shrubbery for a family lawn, a sort of outdoor parlor, if you choose. This is divided from the front or public lawn by shrubs or lattices to give seclusion from the passerby on the street. Here one may be as much in the privacy of home as in the house, and still be out of doors. This is only necessary in thickly settled communities. It should also be separate from the back yard.

Both flower and vegetable gardens should be convenient to the house, in a place free from shade, and still not exposed to the cold wind or burning sun. Oftentimes they may be included in the family lawn. Here should be the showy flowering plants.
It is best to confine foliage beds, or highly colored flowers to this
garden to avoid patches of color on the lawn, which attract at-
tention from the lawn itself, the trees, or general appearance of
the home. In the flower garden one expects these showy plants
and here they are not out of place. Both gardens should be
somewhat shut off from the public way to exclude animals and
the small boy looking for fruit. Of necessity, the working
portion, or back yard, should be in the rear. This includes the
laundry yard near the kitchen or laundry, and the storage yard
near the cellar, or if for tools near the garden. Usually a
hedge or some shurbbery is needed to divide the back yard from
the front or lawn portions.

While this applies mostly to small grounds in the village or
city, much of it is applicable to the home grounds on the farm.
in the country wish to see all there is going on, and rightly too,
Here of course no seclusion is necessary. In fact, most people
for their life is at best an isolated one. Therefore no family
lawn or outdoor parlor if you so choose to call it, is needed. A
level lawn or meadow in front of the house with barn and out-
buildings at the back or side as much out of sight as possible, is
the simplest arrangement. The planting should be low around
the house so as not to obstruct the view, and trees on the lawn
and road for shade. Then the barn and sheds may be screened
from view by belts of trees or shrubs. These will also serve for
windbreaks and shelter from storms. One advantage the far-
mer has over his city cousin, is the short distance to places where
desirable plants are plenty.

When the grounds have been subdivided properly, then the
details of planting may be worked out. Please understand that
while it is cheaper to carry it out all at once, oftentimes it may
be done from year to year as means will allow. Interest in the
work is thus kept up and one is stimulated to further efforts.
The same general scheme should be followed from year to year
to its accomplishment. In locating plantations, each one should
have its special use. To shut out objectionable views, to divide
the front and back yards, to soften the harsh stiff lines of the
house, to give seclusion to the home, these are some of their uses.
Place no trees, shrubs, or vines without an object in view. A
lawn dotted with plants, aimlessly placed, loses half its value and its broad expanse of green turf. Panting at the base and sides of the house is usually all that is necessary on the lawn. The importance of planting against the base of buildings, or along blank walls to relieve the bare effect, is often overlooked.

In making plantations, the ground should be thoroughly prepared as for a garden or orchard. When spaded up, well pulverized and enriched by fertilizer, it is ready for the plants. Shrubs do not grow well in sod. The plants should be placed in masses, so that, at their full size and maturity, the tops will just touch. Weeds are thus shaded out and cultivation is unnecessary. The beds are usually irregular in outline. As some kinds are more broad spreading than others, the edge next to the lawn must of necessity be irregular. The effect obtained from a mass of planting is more apparent than of single specimens. In the natural landscape, the foliage is in broad masses, and the plants in generous numbers to give this effect. This is what the landscape gardener strives to obtain. Nature never makes a straight formal hedgerow. But sometimes a straight regular hedge has its uses as well. When used, the more regular and even it is the better it looks. The proper distance apart depends on the kind used and size at maturity. A continuous line of foliage is desirable. When an immediate effect is wanted, the shrubs may be planted closer, and then thinned out as necessary.

The care of these beds after planting is simple. The weeds kept down until shaded out, the surface mulched with leaves or light covering, the edges cut to keep the grass from spreading, this is all necessary. When a shrub outgrows its place, do not cut it back, but remove it and substitute a smaller kind. Even if no care is taken after planting, hardy shrubs will care for themselves more or less. But it should be remembered that the results will be slower. The same holds true in regard to the soil. The conditions should be as nearly like those of their natural location as possible.

The kinds used depend on conditions, desirability and reason for use. It is better to use a large number of a good kind, rather than a few of many kinds, in order to obtain wholesale rates. At first, few varieties should be used, then other kinds
put in from year to year for variety. A study of the descriptive
catalogues of the standard nurseries, and books by standard hor-
ticultural authors will tell what is desirable. Then if the means
of the owner will permit, the use of nursery stock is advisable.
But if one cannot afford the more expensive nursery stock, then
the hardier natives can be used. And oftentimes they are more
desirable than the ornamentals obtainable. In using wild
plants, their natural conditions should be studied and followed as
closely as possible. The plants of the wood are often improved
by cultivation as the fruits and berries of the garden have been.

When a place is to be improved by planting, the vegetation
growing on it should be noted and left untouched for a time.
After careful observation, the undesirable ones can be taken out
and others added. Many beautiful trees and shrubs are removed
by the grader in obtaining a level surface. I heard of a case
once, where the owner “brushed,” as he called it, a beautiful lit-
tle valley full of native plants, then called in a landscape gardener
for advice to improve it, and was much surprised to find that he
advised the use of the very same kinds that the owner had so in-
dustriously grubbed out. By all means, have your beautiful
and rare plants from other lands, but don’t overlook those near
at home, and thereby destroy the natural beauties of your place.
There’s a happy medium between a wild tangle of brush and
weeds and a nursery collection of rare and often tender plants.

In collecting natives, a good sized rootball should be dug with
as many roots as possible. Care ought to be taken to prevent
drying. Planting is done as soon as possible or the roots covered
with soil until convenient. They should be moved when not in
growth. Those standing in the open, give the best results.
Unless conditions are unusually favorable, full grown specimens
should not be moved.

Oftentimes annuals can be used to give variety, where the
beds are broader and more open. Even then the ones able to
stand shade only should be used. These may be grown year by
year from seed in hotbeds or frames and transplanted.

While most of this paper treats of planning new grounds, it
will apply as well to those already established. Plants already
on the ground may be used. Transplanting, dividing, and
separating, will often increase the stock in hand. The lawn is leveled and seed thrown in or the old sod renewed by fertilizer and cutting. Many people do not realize how much cutting will do to grass. A case of this kind once came to my notice, where a summer cottage was built on an old rough run-out pasture, and by nothing, but cutting, the owner obtained as fine and even lawn as there was in the vicinity. The shrubs should be taken off the lawn, grouped and other plantations put in, where needed. Unless the trees are too thick, or crooked, they should be left alone. It is best to go slowly about cutting down a tree and then only with the best of reasons. Oftentimes the work of forty years is undone in half an hour.

In regard to the cost of plants, the standard horticultural papers should be consulted. Collected plants can be obtained for about five dollars a hundred from those who do collecting as a business. Nursery plants cost about twelve dollars a hundred, that is the ordinary nursery stock. Nursery agents usually charge more than the company, for their prices include commission. However, plants from a nursery are usually better rooted, more symmetrical and hardier. If large quantities are used, then better rates may be obtained. Of course, if the owner does his own collecting then the cost of teaming and labor is all. At the same time, the plants collected by him will be much larger than those bought of plant collectors who are in this business. One has the pleasure then of seeing the results of his own work.

If one sees his neighbor improving his place, then one is, or ought to be, ashamed of his own cluttered back yard, and straightway clean it. Then if the neighbor succeeds with his plants and improvements, then he himself feels more inclined to do something about his own place. Thus, whole neighborhoods may be improved and values thereby much increased. In “union there is strength,” in numbers at least. So while one place improved means much, a neighborhood improved means more. We are all glad to see that the ladies of Wausau have organized a village improvement society and we all sincerely trust that it succeeds as it deserves. As order is Nature’s first law, keeping everything neat and clean is the first step ahead. They have already taken that step and let us hope that they will
include the beautifying of each and every home place and thereby every neighborhood. As the ladies see more of the home, it is only fair that they should have it beautiful to look upon. Therefore if they are interested in making it beautiful, it will be. Their influence in the making of the home is far reaching. So in the next ten years we expect to see Wausau one of the most beautiful cities in Wisconsin.

The National Cash Register Co., of Dayton, O., has been very successful in a movement of this kind. They have reformed the entire side of the city, where their factory is located, from a city tenement district to a neighborhood of pretty little homes, and needless to say, a liberal use of plants has contributed a great deal to it. A similar movement has been started in the city of Menominee of this state by Sen. Stout of the Knapp, Stout Lumber Co. Advice is given each property owner as to improvements in any way possible. Then materials can be procured in wholesale quantities, so lower prices are obtained. The citizens have shown a commendable interest and many have taken advantage of the offer in one way or another. Here it is hoped that example will do much and another season many more will co-operate. But where the citizens themselves start a movement of this kind, it means much more. For this reason, I look for great results in this city of Wausau, already so beautiful.

The value of improving home grounds is in many directions. It inspires a love for the beautiful in Nature. Neatness and order are taught the children. It leads one to be more out of doors and to do more outdoor work. It makes a knowledge of horticulture and gardening more popular and widespread. Pride in the appearance of the home is more noticeable. And one may be sure if the home and its grounds are neatly kept, there one will find a love for it, a pride in it, and its influence on its inmates, of value not to be estimated. And as home means so much to every one, then it makes life easier and more worth living.