AMATEUR GARDENING IN AMERICA

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When the proposition came before me to write a paper for this meeting, it was rather difficult to find a proper subject. Thinking that perhaps I might find something to guide me in the choice, I looked through all the annual reports of this Society in my possession, and it seemed that nearly everything worth considering in the Horticultural line had been written about. Instructions for growing all kinds of flowers, fruits and vegetables worth growing in Wisconsin were given in these reports. What to grow, and what not to grow. What to do, and what not to do. It seemed as if there was nothing left to write about.

However, Gardening is a never ending source of discussion, the more it is studied the greater becomes the desire to know more about it, and the greater the need for knowledge. The words of Shakespeare, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are known of in our philosophy," might well be applied to gardening, for who in the gardening profession can ever be capable of learning all about gardening, and subjects akin to it.

From the dawn of history down to the present day, gardening has held its place in the minds of men. Many brilliant men have devoted their time to this study, and have made wonderful discoveries for the benefit of humanity, and many more of equal value await the searcher after knowledge. Some of the finest gems in our literature, both poetry and prose, have been written by those with a love for the things that grow in garden, field or woods.

Did you ever stop to think of the intimate knowledge of, and love for these things, which our Lord showed in many of his parables and expressions? "Consider the lilies of the field; how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these." What a lesson of purity and humility these lillies
have for us. And again in his parable of the sower, who went forth to sow. How true to life this is, and isn’t there a lesson in it for our present-day farmers. You also know the parable of the unfruitful tree. The owner of the garden wanted to have it cut down, but the gardener pleaded to give it another chance, that he might cultivate and fertilize it, and perhaps bring it to bear. How many of us today are just like that gardener, we have unfruitful trees in our garden or orchard, and yet we are willing to give them another chance.

Were it possible to quote some of the beautiful thoughts expressed in poetry, by poets of high and low degree, showing their love for the beauties of nature, we might fill volumes, but that is not the purpose of this paper.

I have chosen as a subject for this paper, Amateur Gardening in America, because as a private gardener I have been brought into contact with amateur gardeners in different parts of this country, and have had an opportunity to study this subject. I do not intend to give any cultural directions, and am rather inclined to stay on the sentimental side of the subject, hoping in that way that I may be able to touch a responsive cord in the thoughts of the lovers of gardening.

It has been truly said that “Gardening is an employment for which no man is to high or to low”, for whatever position a man or woman may occupy in life, a love for gardening has a refining influence, it brings them closer to nature, and makes life more worth living.

Many private gardeners, whom I have talked with on the subject of American amateur’s, rather regretfully express the belief that amateur gardening in this country is not as popular, or as far advanced as it ought to be. Nearly all of the private gardeners in this country have come from European countries, and are thus in a position to know that amateur gardening is not as popular here as it is abroad.

It is hard to find a reason for this, unless it is owing to climatic conditions. Our winters, in many parts of the country, are very severe, and it is rather discouraging that so many desirable plants are not hardy in our northern latitudes. Our summers are usually hot and dry, and it is sometimes quite a trial to keep up an interest in the garden during the hot days.

However, these conditions should not discourage anyone.
There is pleasure and profit in gardening anywhere, if one has enough enthusiasm and love for it. I have often noticed that in a community where there are private estates, the gardens of amateurs are usually better kept, and a better quality of flowers, and other garden produce is grown. This, no doubt, results from their coming in contact with the private gardener, and from the experience and knowledge they gain from watching his methods, and from the advice they receive.

I believe it is a fact that a strong feeling of sympathy and helpfulness exists among private gardeners for the amateur. They are usually in a position to be able to help, by giving advice in the choice of suitable varieties of things to grow, and advanced methods of growing them. Results proved that this stimulates, and encourages the amateur to do things that otherwise they would not be inclined to do.

Some years ago some of our Horticultural Societies started a movement to encourage and stimulate an interest in gardening. This may have interested some of the better class of people, but it did not seem to reach the amateur. There was always a certain amount of commercialism about it that kept it from having the desired effect. If our horticultural societies could, in some way, help to form amateur societies and encourage them to have amateur exhibitions throughout the late summer months, I believe they could do a vast amount of good.

Nearly all the flower shows held in this country are for professional growers only. In the west here, even the private gardener had, for a number of years, a hard struggle to get recognition worthy of his exhibits. The amateur has no part in these exhibitions, consequently they don’t attend them, and a great many of these shows fail for lack of attendance.

Various reasons have been given for this; one in particular, is that people see so many flowers in the city parks and flower stores, that they don’t need to attend flower shows. To my mind this is not the principal reason. If the amateur had some part in these exhibitions, or if they were encouraged to have exhibitions in the summer months, to show the results of their work, and see what their neighbors had grown, a real interest would be created, and flower shows in general would be better supported. Something is certainly wrong when cities
the size of Chicago and Milwaukee can't hold a flower show without losing thousands of dollars.

The average amateurs love their flowers, and are proud to be able to show what they can produce in their gardens, just as much as the professional grower is proud to exhibit the results of his skill. Why shouldn't the amateur be encouraged? If the professional grower finds pleasure and profit in these exhibitions, the amateur might reasonably be expected to find encouragement and pleasure in amateur exhibitions. I should like to see more interest taken in this line, and greater opportunities provided for amateur gardeners at our state and county fairs. Not only that, but every town and village of any size in Wisconsin, might well be encouraged by our State Board of Agriculture, or by the State Horticultural society, to form local horticultural or improvement societies that would hold local shows, which would create an interest in all branches of gardening. State and county fairs are too big, small communities lose their identity at these fairs.

We in Shorewood, or East Milwaukee as the village was formerly named, have such an organization that might well be copied throughout the country. This society, composed of all adult residents of the village, has given a great impetus to, and has created a spirit of friendly rivalry in gardening that is truly wonderful.

They have held a village fair this past two seasons, and such an enthusiastic spirit has been shown that this is one of the great annual events that is looked forward to in the village. I have had the privilege of judging the flowers and vegetables at the past two fairs, and can testify to the splendid quality of the exhibits. The willingness of the exhibitors to learn all the fine points in exhibiting their flowers, shows the love they have for their gardens, and the enthusiasm they have for exhibiting their garden produce.

There is no commercialism about this exhibit, no prize money is given. The only premiums are the ribbons, and the winners of these ribbons are as proud of them as if they had won valuable money prizes. If the village of Shorewood can have such an exhibition, and make a great success of it, is it impossible for any other town in Wisconsin to have a similar fair? Your President and Secretary have both attended Shorewood's Fair,
and can testify to the fine quality of the exhibits, and the enthusiasm of our amateur gardeners. I am sure that they would be delighted if every village and town in Wisconsin could take up this good work.

Shorewood is situated on the lake shore, northeast of Milwaukee. The soil is very heavy, and is not well adapted to gardening, yet the quality of the flowers and vegetables are equal to, and in some respects superior to many professional exhibits I have seen. The work they are doing under as poor conditions of soil and climate as there is anywhere in Wisconsin, goes to prove that there is profit and pleasure in gardening.

This exhibition in Shorewood is similar in some respects to the amateur exhibitions that are held in a great many towns and villages all over Scotland. I can remember at least a dozen within a radius of twelve miles of my home. These were all held by amateur Horticultural Societies, and were held for the purpose of encouraging amateur gardening.

Anyone who visits Scotland, who is interested in Horticulture, can easily see the interest that is taken in gardening, and the marked ability as a grower the average amateur displays. I have always believed that the work these amateur societies were doing, was in a great measure, deserving of the credit for this. They encouraged the amateur to put forth his best efforts as a grower, and gave him an outlet for his enthusiasm at the fall shows.

The amateurs in this country need encouragement and something to stimulate them to greater efforts. We private gardeners probably realize this more than the average citizen. We come in contact with people in all walks of life, realize their common love for nature, and all the beautiful and useful things in a well-kept garden, and find that as a rule they seem to think it is impossible for them to attempt to grow such things.

This may be true in some respects, because the private gardener has usually facilities that the amateur does not possess, but it is not true in all things. There are many things that the energetic amateur can grow that might compare favorably with what anyone can grow.

Take the Gloxinia for instance. This is a summer flowering bulbous plant, that is seldom seen in perfection outside of a greenhouse; and yet I remember one old lady in the east
that grew them in the window of her living room, and I have seldom seen such beautiful specimens, even on the best private estates.

You are all familiar with the large and beautiful specimen blooms of Chrysanthemums to be seen in the florists' windows in October and November. Very few amateurs consider themselves capable of growing these, although their culture is comparatively easy, and directions for growing them are often printed in garden magazines. Some of the early flowering varieties can be grown outdoors in the summer, and easily brought to full bloom with the assistance of a deep cold frame, with a covering over the sash on cold nights.

The hardy Chrysanthemum also deserves more attention from the amateur. There are many beautiful varieties of these that are well worth growing. Unfortunately cold weather usually comes in Wisconsin before they are in full bloom, but with a little protection they can easily be brought to perfection.

I had the pleasure of seeing this proved by an old gentleman who boarded the train at Kansasville, Wis., on the 11th day of November last. He was carrying a beautiful bunch of hardy Chrysanthemums, which he had just cut that day. The weather was mild at that time, and he had them wrapped up to show off to the best advantage. He was justly proud of them, which could easily be seen by the way he carried them. The general love for flowers was plainly shown by the admiring looks of the passengers, and the companionship of the lovers of gardening was brought out when a lady stopped him to ask some questions about his beautiful flowers. He went on to tell her how he grew them, and how he protected them during the cold spell.

I do not know the thoughts of other passengers in the car, but from the beauty of the flowers, and the conversation I heard, I thought that these worthy plants deserve more attention than they receive.

Very few amateurs realize the benefits of a cold frame or hotbed, at least they don't avail themselves of them to the extent they should. It is true that a cold frame or hotbed needs a good deal of attention, but the benefits to be derived from them, more than repays for the necessary care. Instructions have been printed times without number about how to make up a
hotbed, and the management of a cold frame, yet we see very few in use amongst amateurs.

The commercial grower and the private gardener find them almost indispensable in the growing of many kinds of plants, flowers and vegetables, and the amateur would doubtless find them as useful if their value were better understood.

A friend of mine was very successful this spring in raising a fine variety of annuals in his cold frames, with the result that his garden drew the attention of thousands of passers by, and was the talk of the neighborhood. He is one of the most skillful, and enthusiastic amateurs I have met in this country, and the work he is doing will no doubt be of great value in encouraging his neighbors to follow his example.

It is surprising how much influence for good a well-kept garden has in any locality. Friends, neighbors and even utter strangers meet there, admire the various forms of plant life, get better acquainted with each other, review the various methods of caring for, and cultivating different varieties of flowers, fruits and vegetables, gain experience from each others successes and failures, and go away with a better feeling toward their fellowmen, and with a better appreciation of the bountiful and wonderful things nature, in her lavish ways, had provided for us.

In the past few years we have seen, in various parts of the country, garden clubs formed by ladies who are interested in gardening. They are formed for the study of gardening and floral culture, and are doing splendid work, but we hear of no such clubs being formed by men. Why is this? Have the men no time to get together to consider such things, or do they let their wives do the bossing around the garden. It would almost seem so. Look through the awards in the amateur classes at the state or county fairs, and you will invariably see that the premiums have been awarded to either a Mrs. or Miss So and So.

I have no fault to find with the ladies in this, they are to be commended and encouraged, but I would like to see them get the men interested in their flowers too. It is as unnecessary, however for the ladies to get so interested in their flowers that their husbands will be neglected, as one husband recently claimed to be. He sued for a divorce on the grounds that his wife paid so much attention to her flowers and plants, that she neglected
him, and her household duties. They separated last August as a result. In answer to the husband’s charges the wife said: “Flowers are one of God’s gifts to us, and it is a queer woman or man who does not love them.”

This is probably the first time that such a reason has been given in the divorce court, and were I judging the case, I should have probably found a verdict against the man, because he must have been a queer man, who could have no love in his heart, either for his wife or her flowers. This is probably an extreme case, but as I have already stated, the ladies seem to take more interest in gardening than the men in this country.

One reason for this may be that the evenings are so short that there is little time left after supper until it is dark, and unless one has Saturday afternoon off, or works all day Sunday, the garden gets neglected. I know something about working a garden in the evening in the hot summer months. I tried it when I was an under gardener in the East; that was twenty years ago, and the recollections of how fond the mosquitoes were of me are still vivid. Of course no Scotch Presbyterian would ever dare to work in a garden on Sunday so my garden went the way of a good many other American gardens.

Some one has said that it is impossible to talk for any length of time on any subject without mentioning the war. The value of the home garden has been brought home to the American nation by the war, more than any other cause could ever have done. Charles Lathrop Pack, of American Forestry, has made the statement that more than three million gardens have been cultivated this year, where nothing had ever been grown before.

Gardening has been the great fad this year by people in all walks of life, and while many may drop it when peace is restored, many more will have realized the benefits of gardening, and a real love for it will have sprung up in their hearts.

War gardening, to my mind, however, is quite distinct from amateur gardening. While the amateur may make a splendid war garden, it will take some time to make a good amateur out of the war gardener. The war gardeners’ thoughts are all for raising things to eat, and this is a splendid thing to do at this time, while the true amateur can never neglect the flowers they have loved from childhood, perhaps.

One feature of amateur gardening I have heard discussed
amongst commercial men, is that a number of amateurs when they get a little experience as growers, become semi-commercial and bring their surplus flowers to the cities and dispose of them for less than the commercial grower can afford to do. The result is that the market is glutted at a time when the sale of flowers is at the lowest, and the commercial grower is not inclined to feel kindly disposed toward the amateur. There may be some reason for the commercial man's view of the question, and the amateur probably feels that he has a perfect right to sell what he can. Looked at in the proper light the question ought not to be a serious one. What the amateur is able to sell in the summer months should not injure the commercial business seriously, certainly not enough to counterbalance the business that the amateur brings to the seedsman and florist. To a great extent the sale of flowers, seeds, bulbs, etc., depends on the demands of the lovers of gardening for these things, so it ought to be to the advantage of the commercial man to help the amateur in every way he can.

The true amateur to my mind, is not commercially inclined, he is a sort of idealist, one who considers the work in the garden a labor of love, and puts a sentimental value on the produce of the garden, far in advance of its money value. To be able to give a friend a choice bunch of flowers or to send a message of love with the rarest blooms in the garden, to a sick friend, is a real pleasure, and what joy it brings to those who receive the gift. The toil in the heat of the summer is forgotten in the realization of the beautiful things that are the results of our labors, and in the glorious fall days we have the feeling that we have accomplished something that not only has brought pleasure and profit to ourselves, but our friends and fellow citizens have also shared in our pleasures.

MR. CRANEFIELD: Mr. Livingstone mentioned one point, the competition between the amateur and the commercial gardener. I heard some very interesting comments on that last summer from the market gardeners. It was said to me in the beginning of the season that the market gardeners would surely suffer on account of the back yard gardens, possibly put them out of business. How about it, Mr. Christensen?
Mr. Christensen: I think both amateur and commercial had a chance. I do not think we have suffered any injury on that account.

A Member: Market gardeners had the best season for the sale of plants, in fact, it was so good they ran out of plants themselves. I know one good gardener that actually had no plants for himself when the amateur gardeners got through.

Mr. Baker: I had the pleasure of having charge of over 5,000 commercial gardens in Rochester, New York, this year and I know the president of the association there came out with a very broad statement in the early part of the season that the amateur gardener might better let those seeds remain in the hands of the seedsmen to be taken over and purchased by the gardener who had special intelligence to turn them into something really worth while economically. But I think that the big thing that the back yard farm operations this year has done and that to us as farmers has been an asset, is to give the consumer a better understanding of the cost of production. The average consumer has no conception of what it costs to produce a bushel of lettuce or a bushel of apples or what not, and I think that regardless of the calamity which was foreshadowed and which was dissipated, I think by the very fact that they did operate perhaps a little bit wastefully at times with their seeds, that very thing has brought about a better understanding between producer and consumer in relation to the marketing of those products, or the laying aside of the vegetables proportionate to the amount raised by the amateur gardener. I think that for some time to come we will find that they will be of no importance whatever. The Market Gardeners Association this year have come out frankly and said that they have suffered no damage.