

SCHOOL GARDENING AT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL

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Each spring finds the garden work among children in Washington in vastly larger proportion than the previous year. The Department of Agriculture has provided the means for the work, in order that it might watch the development and establishment of a movement that has been so widespread, particularly in the cities of the East. The beginning, three years ago, was small. From a few successful home gardens of the Normal School students the work has found an established place in the school's curriculum. Every teacher in training for the schools of Washington now receives instruction in practical greenhouse work, in scientific principles of plant-raising, and in methods of teaching the subject to children.

In a short time the influence of this training has been felt throughout the graded schools. Every school in the city, but four, had gardens last spring. Some were pretentious, some were very small; but no matter what their size, the purpose for their existence was civic improvement through the children of the public schools. The plan followed for such gardens is about the same throughout the city. Where there is space at the front or the sides of a building suitable for decoration, the unbroken lawn in the center forms the main feature, with border planting on the side of shrubbery and annuals, and vines on the fences to complete the picture.

The interest aroused among 45,000 children has naturally spread to their homes. They have been encouraged to buy penny packages of seed for home planting. Simple instructions have been given them by means of experimental work in the school-rooms. Many of the teachers have visited these home gardens, and the interest throughout the summer has been kept by urging the children to bring to school in the fall some result of their

home efforts. In consequence of this, every building in the city last September held a flower show.

Until the present time the community garden—the garden in which each child has his own plot, and the garden established for the teaching of agriculture and horticulture—has not found its place in Washington. For three years one small garden of this nature has been in existence; but the Board of Education at the capital has its funds, and its power to use these funds, limited by Congress, so it has been powerless to connect such a garden with its schools. The secretary of agriculture, Hon. James Wilson, has recently made this possible by offering to the board the use of nearly two acres of lawn in the inclosure surrounding the main building of the Department of Agriculture for a children's garden. He proposes to fence the land, plow and manure it, and erect tool-houses. All the board has to do is to furnish the pupils and the teachers to demonstrate to the city and to the country at large the value of gardening as a form of manual training for the children of the public schools, and its value as a vacation movement for children. The board in its wisdom has accepted this offer, and has asked the teachers of five schools to undertake the work as a part of their regular school work. These teachers will be directed from the Normal School, and the plan of the garden also emanates from that school. For the vacation teaching the board must depend upon volunteer teachers, but there are earnest members of the profession in Washington who have volunteered their services for the summer for the privilege of studying the value of gardening in child-development.

These schools will work one afternoon a week, and the teachers, in so far as possible, will make the prescribed course of study bend to the garden. If, however, they cannot complete the course, the practical lessons brought into the lives of the children will much more than compensate for what the everyday world might consider a loss. Following the method pursued in the small garden mentioned, much attention will be given to the teaching of geography as connected with life. The winds, rain-falls, droughts, soil formation, and conditions affecting the

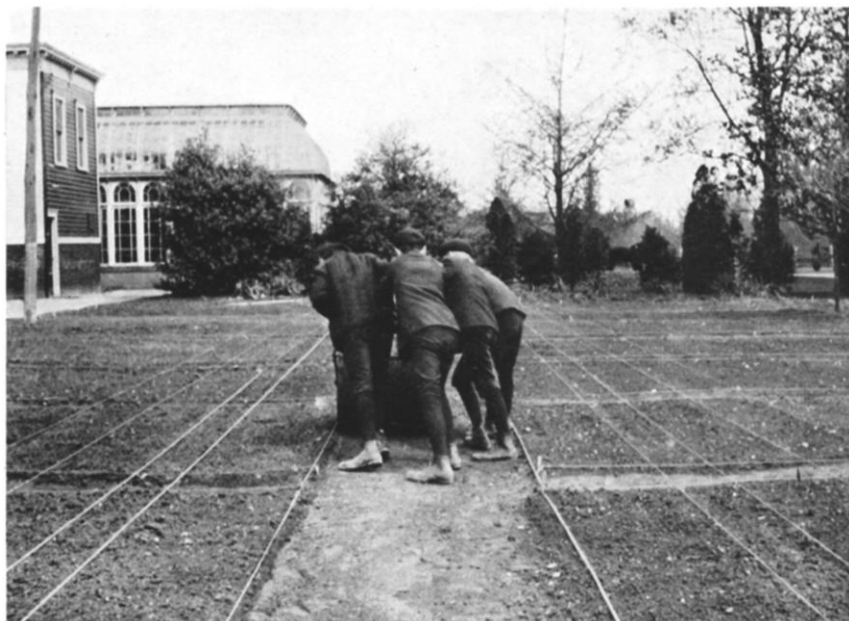


ONE DAY'S GATHERING FROM A PLOT NINE BY TWENTY





AN ARITHMETIC LESSON IN THE FRANKLIN SCHOOLYARD



physical state of soils are taught at first hand. The garden will have a section devoted to the commonest products of the United States and the commonest local products. As these mature, they will furnish material for lessons in regard to their relation to man, the preparation of the raw material for man's use, and modes of transportation to markets. Only by such teaching is geography taken out of the realm of books and made a matter of life.

Much practical arithmetic is involved in measuring, in laying off the land, in calculating the cost of the manure to fertilize the land, the cost of fencing, and the amount of seed needed. Such arithmetic is of far more value and service than much laid down in the course of study which frequently has no application to the living of the present day.

Language, spelling, literature, drawing, painting, and designing will be correlated with the outdoor work, but care will be taken that the idea of correlation shall not make the garden dwarf in importance. The garden is not being cultivated for the sake of strengthening the other studies. Too frequently, particularly in composition work, to procure a variety of subjects, teachers are prone to take the spice out of every event by insisting upon a written account of it. During the great fire of Baltimore several years ago, one of our fifth-grade boys remarked to his teacher that he was so glad he didn't live in Baltimore, for he would have had to write a composition on the fire, he supposed. Such a feeling is death to love of work and interest in it.

As each child has his own plot, whatever he raises is his own—his own to bring to the highest state of perfection in his hands, to protect, to use. The rights of property-owners are most forcefully taught in a community garden.

The day is not far distant, it is hoped, when the Congress of these United States, in its capacity of educators, as it sits in judgment upon the schools of the District of Columbia, will grant to the boys who have no manual training until their seventh year at school, the benefits, now shared by a very few, of a practical development in the open air, by appropriating sufficient funds for school gardens.