The Making of a Country Estate

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

For Planning and Planting of the Gardens and Development of the Landscape Features for Country Homes and Estates

By HENRY WILD
Landscape Architect
Greenwich, Connecticut
413 Madison Avenue, New York
BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Of one who has lived close to mother earth for many years, devoting his life to the study, companionship and cultivation of Nature's bounty, the planning and planting of gardens and fields seems the only life-work worth while. To be compelled to live in the most palatial city surroundings day in and day out, year in and year out, would seem, to the professional gardener, a form of imprisonment for life, for which none of the rewards of success could fully compensate.

The rescue of the "old homestead" has been the dream of many a prosperous city exile, and to many a man the old farm where he was "brought up" still beckons as a possible haven for his declining years.

The man of affairs, who, as a boy, once wandered at will in the country, still dreams, amidst the attractions and distractions of city life, of the open fields, of the gardens and orchards which once smiled their welcome, and plans to own some day a country home or estate as the crowning of a busy and successful career.

Fortunately, an attractive country estate is no longer looked upon as a place demanding a lavish outlay—a source of increasing expense to maintain—and every year shows an increasing number of beautiful country homes in process of development.

Thanks to the progress made in intensive agriculture and scientific garden and orchard cultivation, the transformation of deserted or semi-deserted farms, wooded hillsides and idle streams into scenes of beauty and productiveness has been made practical and possible, even to families of moderate wealth.

The purpose of this book is to suggest, in a general and necessarily sketchy way, some practical methods of developing country estates—methods which have been applied by me in my rather extensive experience as a gardener and landscape architect.

My personal services are open to owners or prospective owners of country homes, both in the preliminary planning and in the working out of the details that go to the making of a harmonious and rational composition, suited to the natural features and conditions of the site, as well as to the preferences of the owner.

There are many conditions which need more careful consideration than is apparent to the layman. Only professional skill and experience should be relied
upon in planning with a view to obtaining the best results, from both the artistic and productive points of view—and the proper correlation of the whole.

It is not enough to know how properly to care for such an estate, or to rely on theoretical ideas or advice. The imperative need, at the outset, is for trained skill and wide experience in the study and planning of the scheme as a whole, with a definite purpose in view, after which the carrying out of well-devised plans can be intrusted to a competent gardener. It is in these initial stages, and for general guidance in the development and care of such estates, that my experience as consulting or supervising gardener and landscape architect can be turned into practical value.

I have a strong sympathy with the tendency toward greater simplicity, individuality and economic productiveness in the development of country estates. A country home should be a "home" in the true sense. It should express, in its comfort, in its wide vistas, and in its absence of artificiality, the broad and tolerant spirit of American life.

In this connection it is interesting to note an outline of this spirit and purpose briefly and tersely explained in a recent number of a leading exponent of the modern "back-to-the-land" movement:

To make America one great garden, as Europe is.
To create an American style of gardening, instead of copying Europe literally.
To have American plants dominant in every landscape, instead of foreign ones.
To use permanent materials everywhere, instead of temporary ones.
To propagate all kinds of plants here, instead of wasting millions on evergreens, etc., propagated in the incompatible climate of Europe.
To develop a passion for privacy and art and kill our passion for show.
To redeem the northern winter from bleakness and ugliness and create a new type of winter comfort and beauty.

To refer briefly to my experience and my qualifications, and to make clear the purpose of this announcement, I will state that I am an Englishman by birth.

Previous to coming to America, twenty years ago, I was employed for five years on the Blenheim estate of the Duke of Marlborough, and later served three years with a leading London firm of florists and decorators.

My first experience in this country was with the gardens and grounds of Mrs. John L. Gardiner of Brookline, Mass., where I remained for four years, and then became head gardener of the neighboring estate of Mrs. A. W. Blake of Brookline.
When Mr. E. C. Converse began the making of the now famous Conyers Manor estate of about two thousand acres, in Greenwich, Conn., I was given the supervision of all the landscape work, the gardening and the general charge of the whole work of developing the plans of the private part of this magnificent country place.

In this responsible position I remained eight years, and the results of my supervision are the best evidence of my fitness and faithfulness in the task undertaken, and in which I feel a pardonable pride and satisfaction.

With that work accomplished, I decided to devote myself to the general duties of landscape and garden supervision of other estates, so rapidly multiplying in the East, rather than to be permanently connected with any one estate.

Therefore, I am now prepared and at liberty to undertake, on the professional fee basis, the personal supervision of gardening and landscape work, to give practical advice and information along all the lines of artistic and productive development, and to see to the proper keeping up of the grounds, wherever my services are required.

Where gardens are already laid out, but changes and improvements are desired, I will undertake the needed alterations in planning and planting, to suit the wishes of the owner, by thorough and economical methods.

I can also agree to furnish competent gardeners to carry on the work intelligently, and will be glad to visit personally, upon request, small as well as large estates, in an advisory capacity.

In the planning and construction of greenhouses to serve the purpose intended to the best advantage, I offer my experience and services in directing the work from a practical standpoint.

This, to insure that they need not be run at a loss, as is usually the case, but to contribute a saving or profit to the estate, not however in the sense of "profit" as a financial or commercial experiment.

In the following pages I have endeavored to outline a few practical suggestions, as the result of my long and varied experience in the several branches of the profession, and will welcome inquiries, interviews or correspondence upon the subject from present or prospective owners of country estates or homes.

City Address:
413 Madison Avenue, New York
(With A. T. Bunyard, Florist)

Greenwich, Conn.
The Making of a Country Estate

During my professional experience in America, as head-gardener and landscape architect, for the past sixteen years, a remarkable growth of sane sentiment toward country living has found expression in many different phases of the "back-to-the-land" movement.

The traditional English country estate has been a family heritage for generations, while in the United States the notable country estates are of recent origin—those of comparatively few pioneers dating back hardly more than a decade or two.

The rapid increase during the past ten years in the number of more or less elaborate summer homes, set in rural surroundings, and attractive country estates of extensive and diversified holdings, shows no sign of abatement, and though the
A GLADE IN THE WOODS, THE NATURAL GROWTH OF MAPLES, OAKS, ETC., FRONTED WITH MOUNTAIN LAUREL, RHODODENDRONS AND HEMLOCK. NATIVE LILIES THRIVE AMONG THESE AND PROLONG THE SEASON OF FLOWERS. THE COLOR EFFECT IN FALL IS GLORIOUS.

movement is in its infancy, there has been distinct progress toward a more rational and less pretentious style of American gardening and landscape architecture.

The Italian ideas and models, so lavishly imitated by the earlier modern estates, are being superseded by more truly American types in both the architectural and landscape features. The uniting of the charms of a rural home, with a proper regard for making the property productive as well as beautiful, and within reasonable limits of outlay, is to a large extent supplanting the "regardless-of-expense" idea of the more pretentious examples scattered throughout the eastern and middle states.

The tendency is strongly in favor of preserving and restoring the natural features of American landscape beauty, the creating of a more distinctly characteristic style of gardening, instead of literally copying Europe, and to give our
native plants and flowers more prominence in the laying out of the scheme for a country estate, or for a more modest rural home.

Another hopeful and significant feature is that men of wealth, weary of the city, are learning that the owning and developing of a home in the country can be made something more than a dream.

They are also learning to waste less and to give more thought and attention to the things that satisfy, instead of the purely artificial adornments, within or without, in planning these havens of restful companionship with nature for their declining years.

There is no lack of desirable farm-land, idle pasturage, and wooded hillsides, waiting development as admirable sites for country estates, and many with great possibilities unthought-of by their present owners.
The good-roads movement, the suburban trolley line, the distance-annihilating automobiles, have brought the back-country districts nearer the city, and yet remote enough to retain the picturesque charm of privacy and comfort.

As no two conditions are alike, the work of development depends largely on the lay of the land.

By the application of business efficiency and modern methods, aided by the trained gardener and landscape architect, these barren places can be made to "blossom like the rose" and to "bear fruit an hundred-fold," yielding both comfort, health and income.

The comparatively low cost of land in America, with the certainty of constantly increasing value, should be strong incentives to the building of a country home. A well-planned estate—large or small—is an investment as well as a pleasure.
The Garden Made Over to Suit Surroundings

It sometimes happens that the owner of an estate on which there is an old flower-garden would like to have it changed to suit modern ideas. Possibly a background is lacking, or the setting is not in keeping with the garden.

In such cases the transplanting of a few large trees in winter with the additional planting of evergreens and large shrubs in spring or early fall will create a transformation. The using of flowering shrubs and evergreens in the perennial or old-fashioned garden lengthens the flowering season, besides serving as a background and means of protection during storms and high winds. The spireas, wigelas, lilacs, altheas, etc., are both useful and ornamental in this respect, and when the flowering season is over form a pleasant contrast to the wealth of flowers
in the borders. Delphiniums, lilies, phlox, hollyhocks, all have an added charm and are seen to better advantage with a background of green.

Planted in masses instead of patches all over the garden, they are doubly effective. In many cases combinations of plantings, with forethought as to color scheme and season of flowering, will aid greatly in making the garden what it should be.

On a number of estates there are gardeners well able to take care of a garden when once properly started, but unable to plan or give the desired results.

A few visits from a reliable landscape architect who has made a study of the subject is all that will be required. The work of preparation is done by the gardening staff, and the planting under the direction of the landscape expert, who could explain the reasons for planting the various things in their proper places, enabling the gardener to work more intelligently and giving him an added interest
Gather ye rosebuds while ye may

THE ROSE GARDENS, IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE RESIDENCE, SCREENED BY A HEDGE OR ROSA RUGOSA, PINK AND WHITE, ALLOWED TO GROW INFORMALLY. A WEALTH OF BLOOM IN SUMMER, BRIGHT WITH SEED PODS IN WINTER

in his work. This has been found to prove satisfactory in many cases, and the ultimate care of the estate and garden has been assured.

The same applies in the transplanting of large trees, making of rose gardens, or any other kind of new work on an estate. Once properly started, the final results are largely dependent on the gardener, who, when made familiar with the work on hand, is in a position to help intelligently in making the garden a success.

A home-owner need not have a square mile of ground to enable the landscape architect to produce good results. Successful and attractive gardens and grounds have been developed around country and suburban homes consisting of a few acres.

The secret of success in this profession is found in the maturity of judgment that comes from long experience. The experienced man can often develop an effective plan in a few hours by reason of his experience in similar cases.
Perennial or Old-fashioned Gardens

This class of flower-gardens, now becoming so popular on American country estates, has much to recommend them. As many families occupy their country residences from early spring till late fall, they are one of the most attractive features. When properly arranged and planted they give a wealth of flowers for nearly eight months of the year.

Embracing, as they do, the old-fashioned flowers of European gardens combined with native varieties, they are a never-ending source of pleasure, utility, and floral education.

During the last few years many varieties have been added to this class of flowers that will withstand the most severe climatic conditions, thereby eliminating
loss and cost of maintenance. Who does not admire such old favorites as the stately hollyhocks, larkspur, phlox, peonies, lilies, sweet Williams, Canterbury bells, that breathe memories of childhood and mother’s garden?

When designed and planted by one who loves the work and who thoroughly understands the combination of harmony, arrangement and color scheme, they are sure to become a source of abiding pleasure.

Given the proper background or setting, their beauty is greatly enhanced, and it is to be regretted that often what should be a thing of beauty and a place to rest—and linger in—proves to be a source of annoyance, owing to lack of intelligent treatment.

The whole secret and charm of the old-fashioned or perennial garden is in its proper surroundings and background.

[17]
"When shall their glory fade"

THE ROSE GARDEN APPEALS TO ALL. MANY VARIETIES FLOWER FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER. WHEN A PROPER SELECTION IS MADE OF HYBRID PERPETUALS AND TEAS, A CHARMING RANGE OF VARIETY AND COLORS CAN BE OBTAINED

The writer has made a special study of this form of garden; in fact, he has frequently been consulted by fellow landscape architects.

The rose-garden, without which no estate is complete, can by right selection of place and varieties be made a thing of beauty from May to October, instead of being devoid of flowers, as in many cases with the passing of June.

Another part of the estate lends itself to the semi-wild. One of the finest instances of this was noted where a house was built in a wood, the undergrowth being removed to a certain extent, the more desirable trees selected to remain, forming an object lesson in natural surroundings and a perfect study of light and shade.

By a proper and judicious selection of annuals there need be no bare places caused by the passing of the flowering season of the earlier varieties.
Wondering, ere we crossed the bridge, what lay beyond"

STEP BRIDGE OVER INLET TO LAKE. VISTAS OF THE LAKE AND WOOD PLANTING ARE SHOWN TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE FROM THIS NOVEL CONSTRUCTION. LOOSE STRIPE AND CARDINAL FLOWERS ARE SHOWN GROWING AT THE WATER'S EDGE

This style of garden appeals to all who love nature, and is adaptable to some part of every estate. The writer has made a special feature of this work, and during the years in which he pursued his studies in Europe and America has not met a visitor who failed to appreciate his skill and art.

One of the advantageous qualities of the old-fashioned, or perennial, garden is that its cost of maintenance is small, compared to artificially planned gardens.

This style of garden fits with perfect harmony into the general scheme where simple, quiet architecture is the keynote.

The old-fashioned garden has a delicate Old-World charm of its own. With its harmony of color and its pleasant smell of flowers in bloom it is the ideal place to read and dream. If one should grow a garden for a poet, could it be any other than one filled with hollyhocks and sweet Williams, Canterbury bells and modest lilies?
Lake and Stream Planting

To make a successful treatment of natural streams and lakes requires more than the usual amount of study of the subject. After carefully going over the surroundings and taking note of plants and trees thriving under natural conditions, much needed and valuable information may be acquired.

In the moist places the beautiful Japanese iris are all at their best. This variety lengthens the iris season, and, with one of the many moisture-loving plants as an under-cover, they are made doubly effective.

Many of the narcissus family thrive under the same conditions, and when planted under the late summer-flowering hibiscus or spireas, there is always something to claim the attention.
Some of the many forms of willows, birch, elders and swamp maple trees can be used to good advantage; on the dry hillsides, native cedars, hemlocks, mountain laurel, etc., are at home, and used with the proper combination of deciduous trees make the ideal treatment.

Water lilies, nelumbiums, or weeping willows, showing through vistas of rhododendrons, form a picture to be admired.

I have had splendid opportunities to carry out this branch of work. The lake planting on the estate of Mr. E. C. Converse is considered by many to be the leading feature of the landscape work done there.

The addition of rustic bridges, when built to correspond with the surroundings, adds a charm to the whole. Where there is a natural woodland on one or more sides
of the lake or stream, one has the proper conditions for introducing rhododendrons, azaleas, foxgloves, native lilies, the beautiful English primrose and lady's-slippers; many things that cannot be used in formal gardens grow luxuriantly.

Ferns, aquilegias and many shade-loving plants lend themselves to the beauty of rambling woodland paths, and when seen in the long shadows of a summer evening leave a lasting impression, helping to create a love of nature and new interest in our surroundings.

I feel sure that the many attractions of this branch of landscape, when better understood, will appeal to all who are fortunate in having on their home grounds a lake or stream.

A lake is so easy to make, where one has a stream, and is so attractive at all seasons, with its sheen of water and its pleasant vistas, that every estate-owner should certainly have one, wherever it is possible.
Evergreens

There are several classes of these beautiful trees upon which the landscape artist depends to a great extent to make the home grounds attractive. Some of the choicest are the retinosporas and spruces. The colors vary from green to variegated green and gold.

They make an ideal setting for a home, providing the proper selection is made. The dwarf varieties varying from two to five feet can be used effectively under windows, on terraces, banks and to front off groups of the tall growing trees.

Where a quick growth or immediate effect is desired, it can be procured in a short time. For wind-breaks or screens they cannot be surpassed. Some are very useful in this respect to shut out undesirable objects and also to protect the less hardy and often more beautiful specimens.
For avenue planting they are ideal. Their appearance being practically the same all the year around, giving a rich yet quiet tone to the summer landscape, and in winter adding a cheerful sight to the estate. A group of evergreens on a bright, frosty morning, their branches veiled in snow, make one of nature’s most wonderful outdoor pictures.

To children they become a never-ending delight. The early birds flock to them to build their nests, and places that have been almost devoid of birds are turned into a veritable paradise for the feathered songsters in a few years.

For woodland and stream planting the hemlock, cedar and pines, used in combination with native deciduous trees, make a decided change to the group or formal effects. Another class of evergreens are the rhododendrons; the hardy hybrids number amongst them some of the most gorgeous flowers. Planted with a background of pines, etc., their beauty is shown to advantage.
For formal garden work the blue spruce, thuyas, yews, etc., add a dignified appearance all the year through.

A choice selection can be made, without fear of loss of trees, that will withstand the most severe winters and do away with the annoyance and expense of replacing, in spring, varieties unsuitable for the surroundings.

My experience during the past sixteen years as landscape gardener has furnished me with much valuable information in regard to the procuring and planting of these trees and shrubs.

On the estate of Mr. E. C. Converse may be seen one of the finest collections of evergreens in this country, planted by me during the past eight years.

Contrary to the general belief, many large specimens have been transplanted by the frozen ball method without a single loss.
The Fruit and Vegetable Garden

In the planning and construction of a country estate, there are many matters of permanent interest and importance to be taken into consideration. From the productive point of view my experience suggests the following:

After the site for the house has been selected, the position of vegetable and fruit gardens should receive early attention, as about the first things expected from an estate are vegetables and fruit.

If an early start is made in this direction, by the time the house is ready for occupancy some returns can be expected. Asparagus, usually the first spring vegetable, and requiring at least one year's growth before cutting, and the strawberry beds, requiring the same time before bearing fruit, should be promptly
planted with other fruits and vegetables that require most time for development, and materially add to the pleasures and comforts of country life.

Berries, grapes, etc., follow with a general planting of fruit trees in season.

The reserve ground should next be taken into consideration, where some good lawn-grass seed should be sown to furnish a supply of turf (an item always needed).

Another reason for starting on the above lines at once is this: While the house is building, little in the line of grading or planting can be done in the immediate vicinity and ample time can be taken to determine the laying out of the avenues, flower gardens, greenhouses, garage and farm buildings.

Strange to say, this important part of any estate—the fruit and vegetable garden—is often neglected. If owners of country homes will take a little pains to develop these gardens, they will find them a source of much satisfaction.
"Old time is still a-flying"

SHOWING GARAGE, CLOCK AND WATER TOWER BUILT OF STONE QUARRIED ON THE ESTATE. THE MIXED TREES IN THE FOREGROUND SHOW WHAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH NATIVE GROWTH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ESTATE ON NATURAL LINES

Landscape Forestry

THE general topography of the estate should be given careful study by a competent landscape architect, and the general plan of the estate considered to secure the best results from the planting of the place. Climatic conditions, exposure, privacy and all natural advantages should be given thought, as all play their part in the general effect.

If the avenue is properly planned, its planting and care can easily be carried out by one familiar with landscape gardening to suit the ideas of the owner. In case the owner has a preference for a certain variety of tree to predominate in the avenue, the planning can be arranged to carry out the purpose harmoniously. If the avenue is straight, or nearly so, the line-planting can in most cases be
followed; on the other hand, should it run through a rolling or wooded country, an entirely different plan must be considered.

If a part of the grounds is naturally wooded, care should be taken in selecting material that will lead up to or harmonize with the natural conditions. For instance, if the drive passes through a wood, composed (as in many cases) of the deciduous trees of the East, charming vistas may often be secured by the removal of undesirable trees, and by so doing benefit those reserved.

Where an undergrowth or fronting is required, magnificent effects may be produced by the introduction of such evergreens as hemlock, spruce, rhododendrons, mountain laurel, etc., at a slight cost.

Here is where the experience of one familiar with nursery stock and prices can save the owner much expense. Very often fine bargains of trees unsuitable
The whispering pines and the hemlocks.

THE PINE PLANTING ON SECTION OF AVENUE—PLEASING IN ITS VARIOUS SHADES OF NATURE'S COLOR—GREEN IN SUMMER, A GLORIOUS WINTER SCENE WHEN VEILED WITH SNOW, FORMING A GRACEFUL AND DIGNIFIED APPEARANCE THE YEAR THROUGH

for specimens can be obtained for this class of work and the amount saved put to the use of buying finer trees for more open places.

A long experience in selecting and buying all kinds of planting material enables me to carry out this important branch of work judiciously and successfully.

Where native cedars or pines predominate, the addition of scarlet oaks, red maples, birch and other trees assist in brilliant color effects. Berried shrubs and trees, such as the mountain ash, berberries and native holly, viburnums, etc., add much to the fall and winter landscape.

Special care must be given to the landscape work in close proximity to the house. No set rule can be applied. A charming setting for a house built of gray stone can be procured by the planting of evergreens, thereby softening the outline and adding a rich, subdued tone the year 'round.
FRUIT, FLOWERS AND VEGETABLES ARE RAISED IN THE VARIOUS COMPARTMENTS. A GREENHOUSE BUILT WITH PARTITIONS ENABLES THE GARDENER TO SUPPLY THE OWNER WITH MANY THINGS REQUIRING DIFFERENT TREATMENT AND TEMPERATURES

The Greenhouse

HERE is hardly an estate of any size that does not carry its range of greenhouses. In many cases their planning and erection is placed in the hands of someone who has not the faintest idea of the particular purpose for which each section is being built, and who studies them from an architectural instead of a horticultural point of view. The result can be imagined when the gardener is called upon to produce roses or fruit in a house that has hardly any of the requirements called for.

I have seen many greenhouses on private estates placed in positions where they are run at a loss and are a source of annoyance instead of pleasure and profit.

My training on some of the finest estates in this country and Europe has given me a great advantage in this particular line over the average landscape architect.