

Ontario Women's Institutes

GEORGE A. PUTNAM
SUPERINTENDENT
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, TORONTO

Flowers for Rural School Grounds

By MRS. JOSEPH DAVIDSON

A PAPER on the above subject by a member of the Kemble Branch should be of special interest at this season. The writer says:

This is a sweet and beautiful subject. How eagerly we look forward to the first flowers of spring, and watch each sunny slope and rock for the resurrection of the first buds! And, having found a few, how our souls warm and glow with joy and love toward the Creator Who has been so bountiful in beautifying the earth that it may be pleasing in our eyes and educate us in all that is good, pure and lovely.

I have read somewhere that Canada produces more species and their varieties of wild flowers, shrubs and trees than any other part of the world, and I know that a great variety can be got within our own township (Keppel). The woods are carpeted with flowers, and no sooner does one fragrant beauty close its short life than several others awake to the call of the season.

As to the educational value and refining influence of flowers there is no question, and our native wild flowers are by far the most potent. The flowers of the hothouse and garden, the so-called improved varieties, are over-fed and coarse in comparison. They are not so delicately fashioned, they have not the inimitable shadings or the subtle woodsy perfume of so many of our native wildlings. So the wild flowers are the very best to bedeck our school grounds, and they cost nothing but the labor of planting them. The first thing to see to is the soil. It should be a rather light loam, but if it is clay, and too heavy, then we will have to haul enough leaf mould to make it right. I have known of more than one fruit and flower garden made up in this way, and it brings the quickest and best results. If the drainage has not already been seen to, it should be done before anything is planted. If there is a low wet corner it does not matter, as we can get suitable plants to put into it, and thereby have a greater variety. But the trees

should be the first planted. After marking off a liberal space suitable for a playground, we can plant trees, shrubs and flowers in the space left, the flowers and low shrubs in front, and the trees and taller shrubs more as a background, and none so near the school as to keep out air and sunlight. Now, having the ground prepared, we are ready to chose the stock and plant it. I have practiced puddling the roots for a number of years, and find it is the best and surest of success. It is done this way: Dig a hole large enough to admit the tree, or plant without doubling any of the roots, and deep enough to set it just an inch or so deeper than it was before. Set the tree or plant in straight up, then pack fine earth in all round the roots; fill in about two-thirds of the earth, packing well down, then throw in water till the plant stands in a soft wet puddle or mud, then throw in rest of earth, and finish with fine dry earth on top to keep the moisture. Carefully planted in this way, there will be no more watering needed, and the plant will go on growing with but very little check. Therefore we will use the same method throughout with trees, shrubs and plants.

Our greatest difficulty in choosing our stock will be in the great number of fine things we have to choose from. In our own township we have at least four varieties of maple—and where can you find anything more handsome than a well-grown maple tree? They are the aristocracy of the forests. The "mountain maple" is little more than a shrub with us. I have never seen it taller than a well-grown lilac. We usually find it on rocky ground along roadsides. It blooms in June, and its spikes of creamy yellow flowers and its bright orange red foliage in autumn make it quite ornamental. The "silver maple," with beautiful sharp-cut leaves, white beneath, glossy dark green above, which turns to a brilliant red in the fall, has long drooping branches, and makes a very distinct specimen tree, not plentiful, and found along the lakes. The "red maple" is found in swamps and low damp woods near lakes and on river banks, and can be easily distinguished

when not in leaf by its dark red branchlets. This also makes a fine specimen tree, and most helpful in the coloring, and would do well near our damp corner.

Last, but not least, is the emblem of our country, the "sugar maple." This is the most common maple we have, and taking it all round, there is no other tree that will bear comparison with it. It should be planted largely, not only in the school grounds, but along the roads and in waste places everywhere. It is clean, fresh and shapely at any time, and in its autumn dress of red, green and yellow, it is a most brilliant sight. A few "paper birch" helps to light up the coloring, also some "mountain ash," whose bright red berries are fine in the early autumn. A few "hawthorn" and "june berry" are to be recommended. Beech is splendid as a specimen tree. There are a great many more desirable trees which could be utilized if room permitted, but the usual rural school grounds are not often more than an acre, and we must not omit evergreens. We have a fine list to choose from: "White" and "red pine," the "black" and "white spruces," "cedar," "balsam" and "hemlock." The "tamarack" with its slender limbs, makes a very graceful tree, and a fine variety, although not an evergreen.

Our native shrubs are as plentiful and beautiful as the trees. "Leatherwood" and "shipherdia" are the earliest in flower, blooming before the leaves come. The "holly" is another fine shrub, with its dark green glossy leaves and bright red berries in late fall and early winter. Then we have two varieties of spiraea which would grace any grounds. Common "meadowsweet," both red and white flowered. "Nine bark" is a beautiful shrub, and easily grown. "Button bush" does well in a damp place. Our numerous family of "dogwoods" should have a place; *C. paniculata* is one of the best, and the "bush honeysuckles" are some of them worthy of a place, and "staghorn sumach" makes a good showing in the fall, with its spikes of bright red seeds. Our wild rose is another family that has some beautiful members. I would not confine myself entire-

ly to wildlings in the case of shrubs. There are so many hardy varieties which bloom later in the season, and some of them are so much like a part of home, such as the syringias or lilacs, spiraea in variety, yellow flowering currant, French honeysuckles in pink and white, etc. Among the wild native climbers there are a few fine ones. The wild clematis (Virgin's Bower), is fine in both flower and fruit, because of the long, fuzzy tails to the seed vessels the children call it "old man" and "fuzzy head." Then there is the "virginia creeper," another fine clean climber. In the fall its leaves turn to fiery red. "Climbing bittersweet" is another good one, with its bright orange fruits, which burst in the fall and expose a scarlet pulp, which renders it quite ornamental.

Of herbaceous plants, the first to greet us is hepatica and "spring beauty." Either will succeed without special selection of soil or situation. The former can be lifted in early spring as soon as you can find the plants, and if laid on a plate in the window and kept moist, will bloom right away, and will be very interesting to the children to watch the blossoms come up and expand. "Spring beauty" is a fitting name for so fair a flower, so dainty is the cluster of blossoms between the two dark green leaves. Look into the tiny floral cup of delicate blush, veined with crimson-purple, which no human hand can imitate, so delicate is the penciling. It has a long stem like fragile silvery cord, sometimes over a foot in length, and springs from a tiny tuber buried in the ground. Closely following are three members of the fumitory family, "Dutchman's breeches" and "squirrel corn." The school children often call them "boys and girls," also I have heard some call them "white hearts." The third one is the "pale corydalis," with its pale lilac blossoms just tipped with yellow—not common, but is found in rocky or burnt woods.

The wild columbine is another beauty, and easy of cultivation, and the trilliums, or wake robins, are general favorites. We have three varieties of them: *T. grandiflorum*, with its large white blossoms is beautiful; *T. erectum* is the dull brick red variety, and *T. erythrocarpum*, or painted trillium, is a pink and white beauty, who loves good living; but all are easily grown. The "dog-tooth violet" is the most common flower of our woods, and in beauty will hold its own with soft yellow blossoms, the petals curving backwards like a lily, and trimly set on variegated foliage and grows anywhere. We find the wild blue phlox (*P. dwaricata*) in damp woods. And the large family of violets; who could desire flowers more lovely than they? And we must not forget the ferns for shady places. There is a host of other flowers appearing throughout the summer, such as the wild geraniums, the toothwort, blue and yellow flags, orchids, the pink and yellow lady's slipper, wild ginger, or coltsfoot, with its curious scented buds, blue and "cardinal minulas," "wood betony," Jack-in-the-pulpit, campanula or bluebells, the tender touch-me-nots, the shy but beautiful pirolus. Bloodroot is a curious plant with red, blood-like juice, and pure white blossoms. In the fall we have the two great families of asters and goldenrods. What a bare autumn we would have without them! But it would take months to enumerate all the beautiful flowers of our woods. On going into the woods it always seems to me like entering the Temple of the Living God not made with hands, and when I am particularly tired or worried about something, I like to steal away into the unbroken forest and let the little birds and squirrels come close to my feet. The murmuring of the trees sounds to me like prayer making continual intercession for a sinful world, and anon as the wind rises I fancy I can hear psalm-singing, and great anthems of praise for all God's goodness to us. As I look above and see the long limbs stretched



GARDEN DETAIL OF "GREY GABLES," RESIDENCE OF MR. J. H. EVANS, LAWRENCE PARK, TORONTO

Chadwick and Beckett, architects. Courtesy of Construction.