

WHAT PLANTS REQUIRE

The needs of plant life are so simple and easily supplied that it is surprising that they are so often overlooked. For germination, a seed requires only moisture and a congenial temperature; for subsequent developments, food, air and light, in addition to moisture and warmth. The water-storing capacity of the soil is just in proportion to its fineness and mellowness, and this moisture is drawn upward about the seed by firming the soil closely around the seed to assist the capillary attraction upward; rapid drying out is to be avoided at first by a light mulch or covering of straw and by cultivation. Too much stress can not be laid upon the need of cultivation, whereby a dust mulch is formed about the plants, preventing under evaporation and admitting air to the roots.

SITUATION

Wherever a choice of location is possible, a site sheltered from the north and west winds, level or with a gentle slope to the south and east is most to be desired. Such shelter from the raw winds that sometimes visit us even late in spring often makes a difference of from one to three weeks in earliness of crop. Accessibility to water supply is also an important consideration.

DRAINAGE

If the soil is not well drained, the first attention must be given to getting rid of the surplus water, which, if let alone, cuts off supply of air from the roots of the vegetables and stops their growth. In a very small garden a surface drainage can be obtained by raising the beds, but really good drainage must be under ground. Tile is of course to be preferred at a depth of about three feet, with a good fall and outlet, and the drains 20 to 30 feet apart. Where tile is not to be had, stones or brick may be placed at the bottom of the ditch, and covered with straw or inverted sods to prevent the loose earth from sifting in.

PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

Whether the garden is made in new ground or in a previously cultivated soil, it should be well manured, and plowed in the fall, and the rough clods, left without harrowing, to the kindly action of the winter's frosts. These disintegrate and aerate the soil, making it ready for planting much earlier in the spring, by which time the manure is well decomposed and assimilated in the soil. As early as the ground can be worked in the spring, it should be again plowed or spaded and rolled and harrowed until fine. A small garden can be brought into best condition with spade and rake. If fall preparation has been neglected, thorough ploughing and harrowing must be given in spring as early as possible and only well-rotted manure can now