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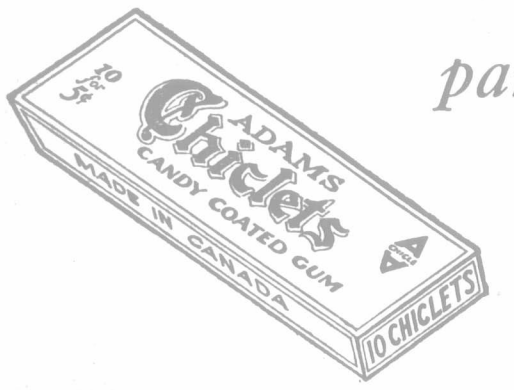

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Our School Department.

Some Plans for Rural School Gardens.

BY GEO. W. HOFFERD, LONDON NORMAL SCHOOL.

It is a difficult matter to plan a simple school garden to meet even the majority of conditions in a school yard. The guiding principle should be to make the most of the natural surroundings. In selecting a site for your garden study the soil, drainage, relation to sunlight, trees and fences, protection, economy of space, artistic and decorative possibilities, and then plan to make the garden attractive, useful as a school laboratory and bountiful in production. Aim to make your school garden more efficient than the average garden usually found in the community, and manage it so that it will attract the attention and interest not only of the pupils, but of the parents and trustees.

For educational purposes the chief factors are a variety of production, and the nature of the practical work required. Thus, the teacher would do well to arrange that plants which are easily grown should be assigned to Form III and younger pupils. Form IV should be expected to work out such exercises as transplanting seedlings, and successive cropping by planting a later crop between rows of an earlier crop, etc., so that when the first crop is taken up for use, the later plants will come along for fall use or winter storage. The idea of thrift may be thus inculcated.

A school garden should emphasize quality more than quantity. The Canadian gardener and farmer has a strong tendency to stress the size and extent of his farm or garden, and has yet to learn the important lesson of intensive farming. This is one reason why a small garden, well worked, will score a higher

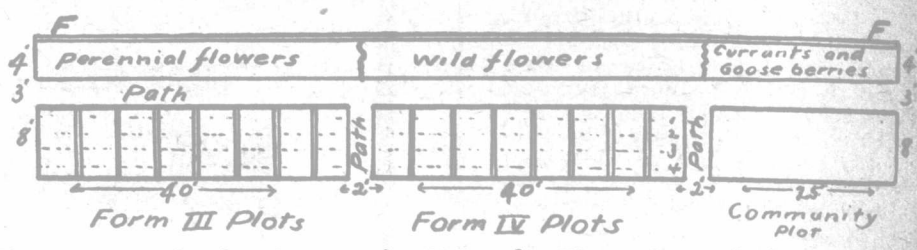

Fig. 1—A Simple Plan Adapted for 16 Pupils. The Individual Plots are 8x5 ft.

Figures I and II are two simple and easily adaptable plans, each fulfilling approximately the regulation area of 6 square rods. In Figure 1, only a narrow strip of land is required, preferably along the north side of the school grounds, where it would not be shaded by the fence during any part of the day. A strip like this is easily and quickly plowed.

Figure II is a wider, but shorter plan, suitable for a corner of the school grounds, preferably along the north side. Both plans emphasize the ideas of individual plots of pleasing proportions, a community or experimental plot, a border of perennials, economy in space for paths, and conservation of moisture. The measurements of the garden should emphasize such units as the chain, the rod and the yard, and arithmetic problems given based on actual measurements made by the pupils in the garden.

Individual plots place a definite responsibility on each pupil, and this usually stimulates interest. Rivalry and ambition to obtain good results and have a neat, clean plot can also be aroused by having each pupil plant for example, one row of tomatoes, one of potatoes, one of beets or carrots, etc., these being so placed in each plot that one long row will run across all the plots of the form, as indicated in Fig. 1, rows 1, 2, 3, 4. All the pupils should plant their part of the long row of each variety at the same time under the teacher's supervision. Then, if all have the same chance, the results will be according to the pupil's care and diligence. Each pupil will be constantly comparing his plot with the plots of the others in his form. Discussion will naturally arise among the pupils themselves as to why one plot is better than another, etc. The plan of Fig. 2 can be similarly worked out for planting rows 20 to 24 inches apart the full length of the garden across the plots.

Another plan, very economical, but less definite, is coming into considerable favor. By it the whole garden area is left like a farmer's field without any paths and the crop is planted in straight rows the full length of the garden. Each pupil is then given charge of a piece of each row marked off by stakes.

The community plot can be used to awaken another kind of interest in which the planning and care of the teacher are most prominent from a point of view of scientific agriculture. All the pupils, especially those of Form IV should keep records of the experimental investigations carried on. Various problems may be studied such as crop rotation, value of different kinds of fertilizers, ways of training up tomato plants, testing out different varieties of potatoes, carrots, cabbage, beets, cauliflower, parsnips, radishes, wheat, oats, barley, or the growing of garden seeds from biennials, etc. The eradication of weeds and such control of plant growth by mulching, thinning, etc., as may be necessary to obtain the best economic results should be emphasized through the school garden and this community plot.

The hardy perennial border should be an important feature of the garden and prove a never ending source of pleasure to the pupils and teacher. The plans place this border along the fence with a depth of four feet, but the size may vary according to the conditions and purposes of the garden. Certainly the garden should have this border. Why not plan to have such a beauty spot even 5 to 8 feet wide? Then the edge along the path might have a sweeping curved outline, which would add much to the relief and attractive appearance, according to the principle that curved lines are more pleasing than straight outlines and edges.

The above plans, though simple if carried out by an interested teacher, should succeed in making the pupils realize some fundamental principles underlying farm operations, and render them capable of thinking and investigating for themselves. Such a practical study of agriculture will aid vastly in the pupils' mental development, and will immeasurably increase their pleasure in school and farm life. This being the case fewer of those who have been brought up on the farm will be inclined to leave it.

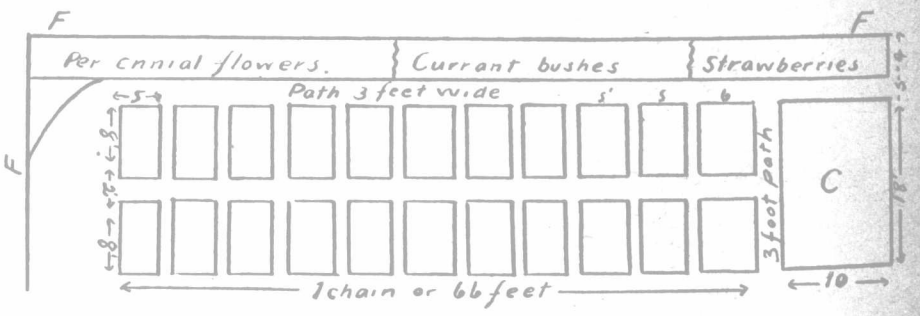

Fig. 11—A School Garden Plan Adapted for 22 Pupils. F Represents a fence, and C the Community Plot.