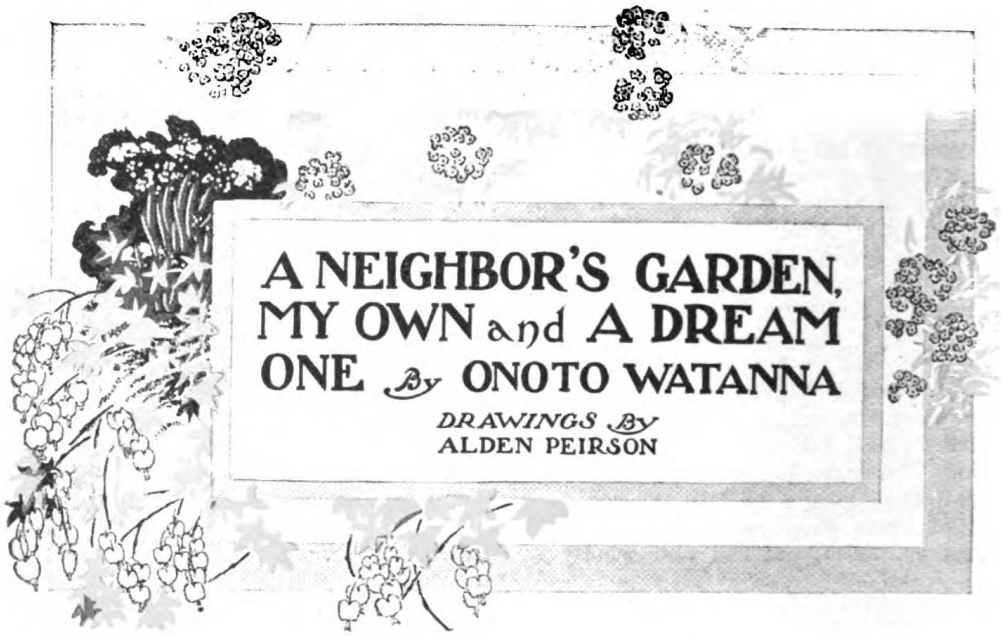



# My Own Garden

[*Concluded*]

I DECIDED upon a garden —and ceased to dream. If a woman of the age of my neighbor (she was about fifty-five) could with her own hands set out and plant a garden, why could not I, young, healthy and ambitious, do likewise? Katy could mind the babies for a time entirely, and the brown-faced girl who did my housework was only too anxious to take full charge of the rest of the work. Fanny was a born housekeeper, and I know she always saw through my various brave devices to make her think I was one also. For I'm not.

I sent at once for a catalog to a well-known firm, and in due time arrived a most gorgeous and fascinating pamphlet, giving pictures, descriptions and directions regarding more flowers than I had hitherto dreamed existed. About this time also a publisher friend sent me a book on Hardy Gardening—a delightful, alluring book There followed a few days of excited preparation, and nights when, propped up in bed, I read and re-read the book and the catalog. Also I telephoned to Mrs C that I was about to start a garden and I had "such ideas" that I didn't want her or anyone to see it till it was quite started. Then!

About this time there came to my door a peddling florist. I bought from him three dozen pansies and a like number of geraniums. Also a few forget-me-nots—all in bloom. I had hardly set these out in a prominent place on my front lawn, when my precious seeds arrived and a few hydrangea bushes. I coaxed my husband into planting the latter for me in the big round bed, formerly the actress's pride and the florist's profit. Then I went to work digging. How I dug! And dug!

It was hard, hard work, but I kept at it till my back ached and I was as grimy as a hired man. I had to pick out the endless number of stones which seemed to be in the earth, and I never realized before how very hard it is to make one's earth crumble up. Mine looked so lumpy, even after I was through, and where I had dug up the sod to make a bed the earth looked sunken; in some places almost like a little hole. However, I patiently carried two or three loads of earth in a wheelbarrow from the aforementioned big bed, and gradually my beds assumed a respectable appearance.

I began to plant the seeds. following the printed instructions on the little envelopes. Suddenly I remembered that I had forgotten to put down the manure and the fertilizer that had come with the seeds. So I had to scatter these *over* where the seeds were planted, supposing it would have the same effect. I refused to refer either to the book or catalog

"The wonderful wistaria of Japan"

upon the subject, in case I was mistaken.

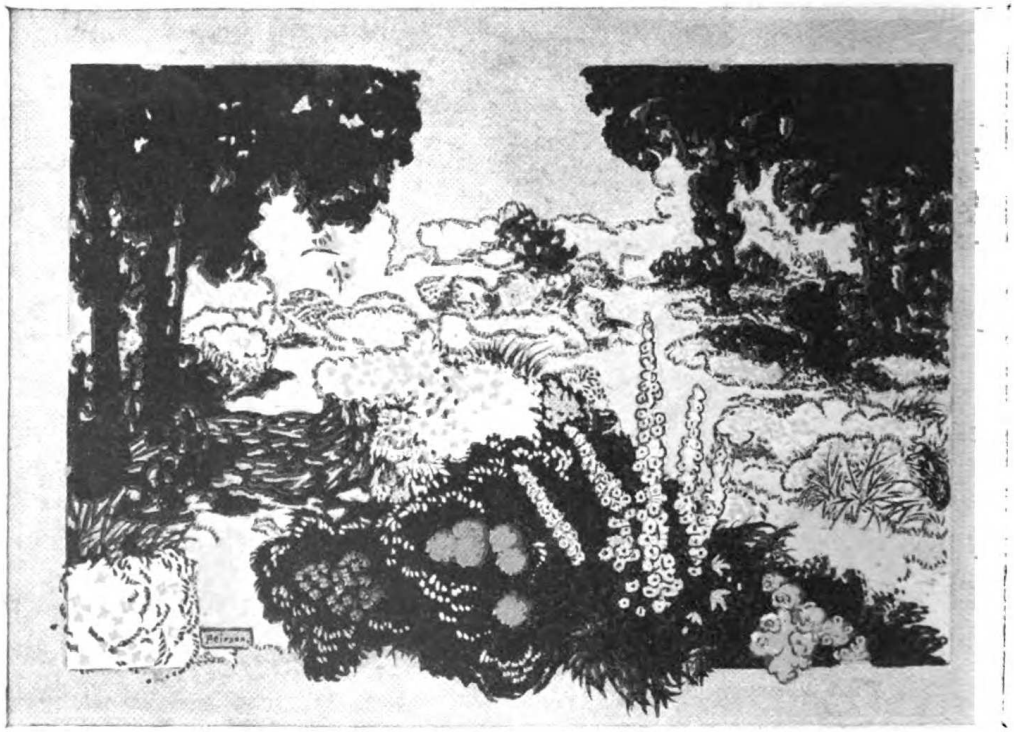
In the beginning I had intended to have a real garden; but the seed firm sent me only enough for a few beds in those bare spaces about the house which looked as if they were just waiting to be planted with flowers. So I ruefully decided against a "garden" this year. Then I went over to break this news to Mrs C. "It's too late," said I "for a garden this year, but I have set out some beautiful beds all around the house."

After talking with the lady awhile, I was mortified to discover that I had made a foolish mistake. In my zeal to get the planting done and over with, I'd forgotten that the seeds all had different months for planting. I had set them out all on the same day, having spent the previous week entirely in digging. However, I hoped for the best, and I did not tell Mrs C. It was still May—the end of it—and most of the flowers I had planted were perennials. Even if they did not bloom this year they surely would next. Anyhow, I was not going to borrow trouble. Besides, I intended to give so much care to those seeds I had planted that they were bound to do better than the ones just planted in the ordinary way.

I rested for a time from my labors, though three or four times daily I most sedulously watered the earth where I had put down the seeds. The first thing in the morning I was outdoors, down on my knees, trying to find the "first showing." My pansies and geraniums meanwhile continued to thrive, and as they had spread considerably, I moved some of them to the tubs still vacant.

The boxes with the rudbeckia in them looked very promising indeed, and I was proud of them. No bloom yet, but how that rudbeckia did spread! My mother had given me a few sprays of English ivy she had brought from the home of Dickens when last abroad. These I had previously cherished indoors. I now brought them out and added them to my veranda boxes. They made only a thin little showing, but the foliage of the rudbeckia itself was so thick and green I felt well satisfied.

Then came the wife of the Englishman to call upon me, and proudly I took her out to show her the progress of her husband's gift—the basket of rudbeckia roots. The lady at first seemed quite taken aback. She sat down, almost breathlessly, and she surveyed me with a look of mingled compassion and amusement. Then she said:



"A perfumed, lovely Eden"

"Don't you know rudbeckia?"

"Why—er—of course," said I. "It's a very pretty flower," I added cordially.

After a moment's silence, she said:

"It's nothing but the common golden glow. You probably know it by that name."

I did. I had an instantaneous mental picture of my boxes with the six-foot tall golden glow looming up from them and shutting out the blessed light.

The lady at once sought to put me at my ease. She told me stories of the early gardening of Mrs C, and another story concerning a neighbor.

"My husband," said she, "gave her a basket full of common sunflower roots, jokingly remarking, 'Here's a pretty border for one of your beds.' She took him in earnest, and in not so long a time the whole neighborhood enjoyed the unique spectacle of a round flower bed, the border of which was the common sunflower. No one ever knew, save the lady herself, what was planted in the center of that bed, as it always remained unseen, and to this day she has not forgiven Mr B."

The following day found me furiously at work transplanting the rudbeckia to a sunny corner of my house.

Next week I went to the woods, as they do in all flower books, and I dug up a lot of ferns. They seemed a lot to me, anyhow. I carried them home alone. I had been unable to induce my husband or Katy to share these labors. We possessed an evil-smelling automobile, the darling of my husband's heart, and whereas he complained that in these days I was "always muddy," I retorted that he was "always greasy," and when he said that he never saw me save doubled over some patch of earth, I inquired whether he went to sleep under his machine, for I'm sure he spent most of his time at home underneath the automobile. Anyhow, I dug and brought home my ferns without help of any sort.

"I shall have flat white stones and slabs as stepping stones, as the Japanese do"

I began anxiously to look for results from my seeds. A green growth had indeed cropped up. It looked, however, suspiciously like weeds or grass but for a few distinctly

"A little lake or pool, wherein I may grow sweet water lilies"

shaped leaves that appeared among it. After a few days of serious inspection I decided these were my flowers. So I weeded out the green grassy-looking growth, and left in the distinctly shaped leaves. They appeared in nearly all my beds, and I was a bit puzzled at their similarity.

I made another call on Mrs C, intending to ask her advice about the matter. When, however, I saw her "blooming spot" and recalled my own melancholy, shriveled, little "non-blooming spots," my courage failed me. I did not want anyone to see my beds.

She had heard the story of my rudbeckia fiasco. How tales travel! She laughed a bit, and then:

"Don't worry about it," said she, "I just know that you are a natural gardener, anyhow. All of your countrywomen are. I'm ever so anxious to see your little garden. I know very well it will reflect the color and taste of your far native land."

Alas for Japan!

I went home in something of a panic.

I called up on the telephone the florist to whom the actress had recommended me.

How much would he charge for setting out for me, at once, a flower garden—lots of beds, and, if possible, the flowers must all be in bloom. After a few questions on his part, and explanations, he named a price. I dropped the telephone receiver. I will not tell you the price he named for fear a certain actress might read these lines and—grin.

A mere townsperson, one who lives in a New York flat the year around, came out to visit me, poked among my grubby looking little beds and had the audacity to say:

"You say you weeded these? Are you cultivating dandelions?" (The distinctly shaped leaf plants I had carefully left.)

And the next day Mrs C "dropped over at last" to see "that garden." I almost wept as I showed her around. Not a single flower, save those I had purchased from the man who had come to my door! In all my beds I seemed to have left the weeds instead of flowers. And how those weeds did grow! What tremendous sizes they achieved in all my most hopeful beds. Some of them required all my strength to pull out, and usually the horrid roots still remained firmly in the ground.

I wonder what my garden friend thought as the summer progressed. For a time I kept away from her, actually depriving myself of the pleasure of visiting her garden, which I loved. A telephone call, however, sent me over there. It was midsummer now, and her garden was a thing of glory—all reds and yellows. I surveyed it with speechless admiration, then I turned to her:

"And you planted it all yourself? What an utter little failure I must appear to you!"

It was then she made to me a queer confession. She had indeed planted the garden all herself, as she had said. The garden was her own personal handiwork, she could truthfully say. But she had hired men (strong-armed men, who are good for so much in this world) to do the digging—*and* the weeding!

The digging! Why, that was what had discouraged me from the first. At the outset to be fronted with the heavy labor of a man.

And the weeding! How could *I* tell a weed from a flower in its infancy? But the practiced eye of a regular gardener could at the outset have discerned the difference.

"Next year," say I, "I, too, will have a man. I can do without a spring hat—or rather, babies thrive just as well in rompers as in expensive, starched frocks. The little dears shall contribute to my garden, and the needful article—a man!

## A Dream Garden

We must move away to a new place entirely. It must be close to some densely wooded lands, as without a background of woods, it would seem to me like a picture without an adequate frame, and I want my garden to be a romantic spot, a perfumed, lovely Eden. From this wooded forest, jumping down over rocks and mossy places, must pour a little stream or rivulet. It must wind in curves and dips, and when it reaches about the center of my garden it must become a little lake or pool, wherein I may grow sweet water lilies and lotus, or where, instead, the shining-bodied gold fish may play and swim.

I want no hedge. Rather, my garden will be open on all sides, so I may always see it. There must be a small summer-house, pagoda shaped, and built of old gray stone. A trellis work of some kind shall be built out slightly over my pond, and over this shall be trained the wonderful wistaria of Japan. This flower is never so lovely as when it clambers over some dipping bough or eave to peer at its own drooping reflection in water underneath. That is how they love to grow it in China and Japan. But the wistaria bloom is short-lived, and when it has died with the spring, what can I do to replace its beauty? Mingle the white-faced moonflower vine among the wistaria, or even some morning glories.

Roses I love, but not as others do. I do not name the rose queen of flowers. To me they are chiefly attractive after they are cut. The climbing ramblers are, of course, very lovely while growing, but the formal, stiff-necked, larger varieties never appealed to me, save as decorative house creatures. They are domestic flowers, house pets, trained, civilized. But, ah, to me they have not the charm of other flowers of which I know!

I know a long, narrow bed of yellow coreopsis. When the wind blows ever so faintly these small gorgeous flowers look like an Oriental army marching with flying colors. Beside them, more brilliantly, more triumphantly, move an army of brazen poppies of enormous size and beauty. But the coreopsis sway with the

wind, and every toss of their little heads makes me feel they are a stronger, cleaner race, and more beautiful even than the opium-freighted poppies.

There shall be no pebbled paths cut into my garden. My walks shall be entirely of grass; and that the tread of our clumsy feet, or the high-heeled shoes of some I know may not wear out my sod, I shall have flat, white stones and slabs as stepping stones, as the Japanese do.

Though all flowers are lovely, yet many of their stalks and bushes are unsightly, and spoil the artistic effect of a garden. Therefore I banish sweet peas to a few steps lower than my garden. I wish only to see their heads.

I must have a single cherry tree, set on a bit of greensward by itself. Under its shade I shall break up the earth as a bed, and there I will plant purple and white pansies. They love the shade as few other flowers do. Under my magnolia tree—or shall I have it a plum tree?—I'll have a great bed of lilies-of-the-valley, and these, too, I will mass all about my pagoda, and close to my little pond.

There will be no distinct form or style to my garden. I am not an orderly person, and if I choose to scatter my flowers in madcap fashion anywhere they will grow, I will not spoil the landscape effect. I scorn a bed whose middle piece springs up stiff and tall, with red-piked flowers, while, encircling it, lower and lower, appear other flowering pieces, till the final border, dear to the heart of the conventional gardener. A star-shaped bed, or any fancy shape, makes me positively shudder. Flowers should have a chance for picturesque growing.

I know an old and dried-up fountain in the garden of a little old-fashioned French woman who delights to grow phlox, bachelor's buttons and asters. This fountain is of some fanciful iron. Its central piece is a slim statue figure of a man holding aloft a slender pipe to his lips, from which, I presume, originally dripped the water which filled the little fountain below. The old woman makes of this old dried-up fountain each summer a thing of such ravishing beauty that I yearn to steal it for my own.

In the fountain bed she has great yellow and red flowers. I do not know what they are from where I look in at her gate. There is English ivy and some bright red flowers mingled with it, about the statue itself, and a vine whose flowers appear to be deep purple—a star-eyed, exquisite flower. Then I think there are nasturtiums and geraniums growing in the curved arm of the figure, whose face alone is uncovered by vine or flower.

Whenever I see ferns growing in the woods, I always think: "How easy to transplant! Why, half a day's work and I shall have all I could want." But try it. Large ferns have large roots. One needs great quantities of little ferns to make any showing at all. It is amazing how easily the stalks break; and often, thinking I had a large quantity of ferns, I have returned home to find myself with a mere handful after I had discarded the bruised and broken ones.

Yet, I shall have a part of my garden entirely for ferns. It shall be at the edge of my garden, nearest to the woodland, and I shall look to these neighboring woods as a sort of wild protection for the transplanted creatures from their heart.

When I have planted my beds just as I desire them: the old-fashioned, hardy flowers here; purple-colored varieties there; scarlet beauties here; yellow, golden ones there; delicate-faced ones all by themselves, or with the lilies, and Oriental exotics apart also, I shall plant among my ferns numberless wood violets and maybe a few of the more delicate wild flowers.

Then I'll begin to realize the necessity for a fence or hedge. I do not want one, and I am quite sure it would spoil for me the beauty of my garden. Yet creatures of prey exist who even come into a cherished garden; and whether they come to steal or for vandalism, and whether they be dog, man, chickens or small boy, their work is as devastating. So I've bethought me. I shall have a *snake* as the guardian of my garden. Who does not fear a snake? It shall be a great, beauteous creature whose fame shall be known to all the neighborhood, and I also shall share in its fame, perhaps as a supposed "charmer," or "witch," for *I'll* not be afraid of my flowers' protector, nor will it be afraid of me. Who knows we may walk together, looped in each other's arms; at least it may loop itself on my arm.

"Ugh!" I hear some people say, "Who'll want to go near you then—or your garden?" Keep away, then. Gardens thrive best when only those who love them step upon their paths. I'll twine my green-bodied, yellow-eyed protector at my gate—I'll have a gate even if no hedge or fence—and only those shall enter who fear it not—or know the secret.