

Preparing Wild or Rock Gardens

THE wild garden, as the name suggests, is a garden of informal outline; but it is not, as many think, a wilderness, requiring little or no attention. The primary purpose of the garden is flowers, and if success be had, there must be a degree of care and regard, although in the wild garden, once established, these may be reduced to a minimum.

A wild garden consists of a collection of plants, perennials and shrubs, placed so nearly in the state of their original environment that they become established and take care of themselves.

Very often an entire property is developed along naturalistic lines, aiming toward the picturesque in landscape design. Such a development may not be classed as a wild garden, as very often the effects secured are the result of almost constant care.

An Isolated Feature.

The true wild garden should be treated as an isolated feature and will appear best in a depression where it is practicable to plant the side slopes with evergreens and flowering shrubs in a naturalistic way. When boulders are at hand it may be made even more picturesque by placing them on the slopes and extending the plantations of wild flowers around them to tie the entire scene together.

Very often a favorably located spring will supply running water and add a feature to the wild garden of inestimable worth. Many and varied are the native plants that can then be introduced, and charming, indeed, the effects procurable.

In the wild garden the paths should be of turf or stepping stones and very broad, allowing the flowers to sprawl over the path in places without interfering entirely with the purpose of the walk. Stepping stones should be placed 22 inches, center to center.

Beds for the establishing of flowers should not be more than six feet wide. Where it is necessary to have them larger, it is preferable to place shrubbery in the center of the bed and allow about three feet between the shrubbery and the turf edge of the path.

As in the flower garden, the aim should be toward continuity of bloom. There should be no lack of flowers at any time, although the Spring and Fall seasons will be the most flowery. In this respect, great aid may be looked for to the hardy bulbs. Nothing is quite so pretty as colonies of snowdrops, jonquills, daffodils and similar bulbs thoroughly naturalized.

The Rock Garden.

The alpine or rock garden is closely akin to the wild garden, as here, too, we endeavor to establish plants as nearly as possible in their native environment. The rock garden should be apart and secluded from the flower garden. If it is possible to select a place where there is running water, it will greatly enlarge the variety of plants that may be grown and increase the possibilities.

The rocks should be placed on a gentle slope and the surface so varied that the contour will be undulating. A few large rocks are better than many small ones. When placing the rocks, adopt a plan of stratification, so that the strata all run in the same direction. Secure the largest boulders possible and arrange them so that the most formidable stones come at the base. In some places the arrangement should be almost perpendicular and in others flatten it out to a more gentle slope. In this class of work we are imitating nature just as closely as possible and the boulders must be so arranged as to appear inherent in the soil. An abundance of good porous soil must be used and well mixed with leaf mould and well-rotted manure to establish and grow a good assortment of rock plants on many of the so-called rockeries. The pockets for soil are far too small and devoid of moisture, so that only the very hardiest of drought-resisting alpine can exist.

Arrangement of Plants.

The arrangement of the plants should be in clumps or colonies of one variety, and not a mixed planting, where the strongest-growing kinds can overrun the weaker, many of which soon perish.

When a rock garden is constructed on a dry hill, it should be provided with a sub-irrigation system, as many alpine plants require a deep moist soil. This is very much more important than the shade or partial shade so often thought necessary to their well doing. Such a system of irrigation may be economically installed by running a two-inch agricultural tile along the top of the slope, 12 inches

below the surface. The bottom of the trench should be inclined toward the rockery and given a fall of one-eighth inch to the foot in its length; it should be filled with crushed stone or clean cinders, placed around the tile. The tile should be connected with the nearest point of supply by a wrought iron pipe. This, too, should be placed 12 inches below the surface and connected at the faucet with rubber hose. The use of valves is thus done away with, such as would be necessary if the line was directly connected with the water supply system. Where the rock garden is close enough to the house, water may be applied directly by hose, but the irrigation is to be preferred.

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