

The Horticultural Improvement of City Lots.

Landscape gardening is not, as many people suppose, an ultra-practical fine art. Both as an art and as a science it is as applicable to the needs of everyday life as its nearest relative, architecture, or as horticulture itself.

The designing and care of large city parks has been recognized as professional work; but short of such undertakings any farmer or lawyer believes himself able to plan a cemetery, a school yard or the planting about his own house. And he believes that any day laborer about town is able to do the work after that. He is usually as much mistaken in the one as in the other. There is not time here to preface a proper review of the methods in common practice, nor to outline fairly the field of possible improvement. We will confine ourselves for the present discussion, strictly to city residence lots and consider briefly their arrangement in the light of the ordinary principles of harmony and good taste.

The average man when he buys a lot or two and starts out to make a home upon them proceeds with the most systematic disregard of the principles which guide his wife in the attractive decoration of the parlor within. Ninety out of every one-hundred residence grounds which you see about our villages here are planned substantially as shown in figure 1. The house is located in the middle and to the front. This makes the lawn look small and cramped to begin with. Then the drive to the barn goes straight down from the sidewalk, so that passers-by may have no trouble in seeing what goes on down there. The walk from the house to the street is straight and narrow and built of boards. Nothing could be worse. Besides being strikingly an artificial feature, and because it is so, it divides the lawn into two insignificant grass patches. The trees are all planted in straight, accurately spaced rows — another eminently artificial feature. They never grow so in the woods. The only way by which they may possibly be made to look worse is to have the trees of assorted varieties; so that, instead of an even, regular row which often looks well along an avenue, there appears an irregular, uneven, broken row. The effect of symmetry attempted in the straight line is lost in the planting. It is as though a regiment of soldiers were drawn up in

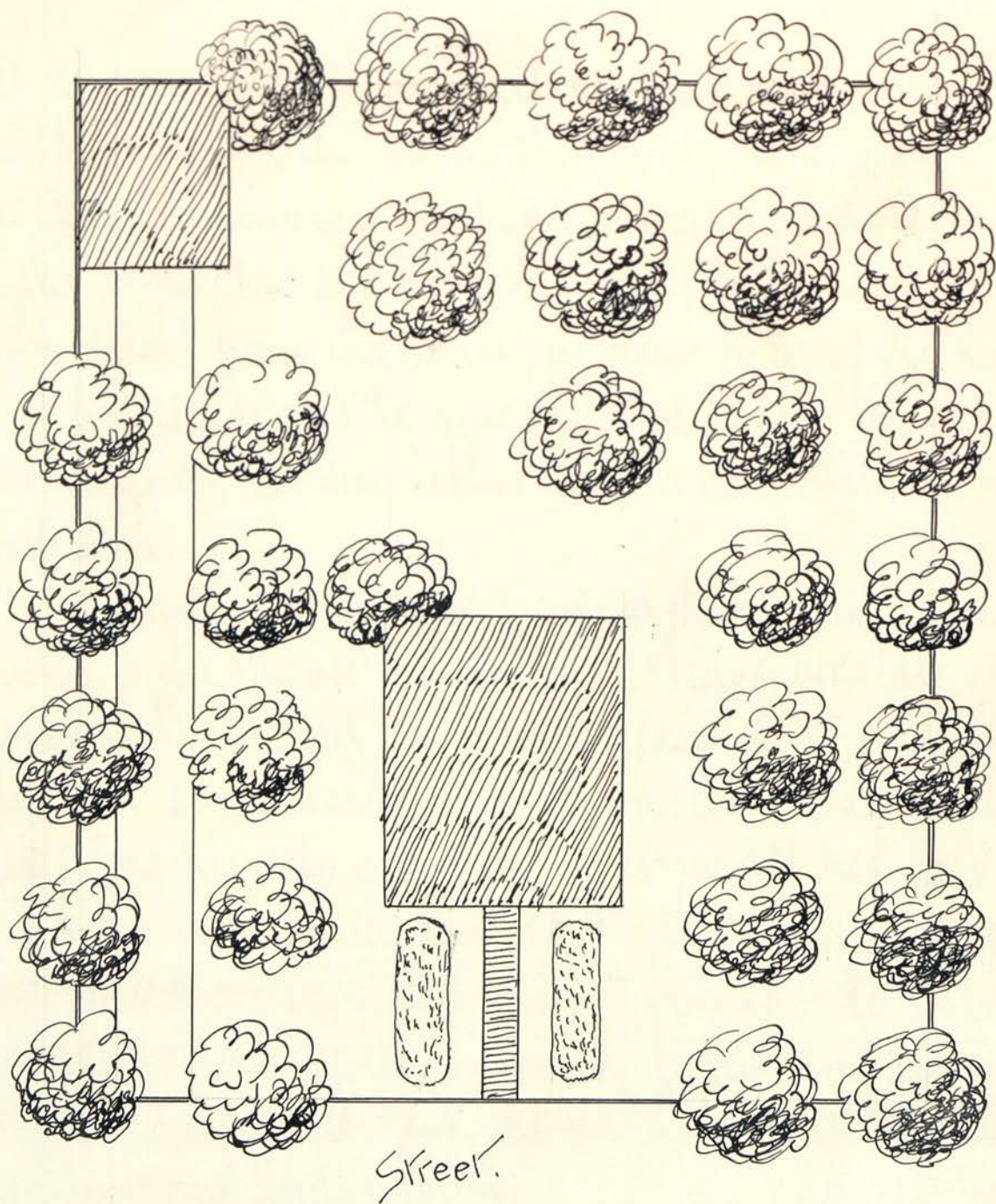


Figure 1. Plate I.

G. A. Waugh.

line and wearing their uniforms, but with the tall, lean man standing next to the short, fat man. Then, too, these trees are so numerous and so ill-arranged as to shut out all the light and air from the house; to prevent any view of the street from the house, or any view of the house from the street; and to give the whole place the character of an overgrown nursery rather than a bit of Nature's own handiwork.

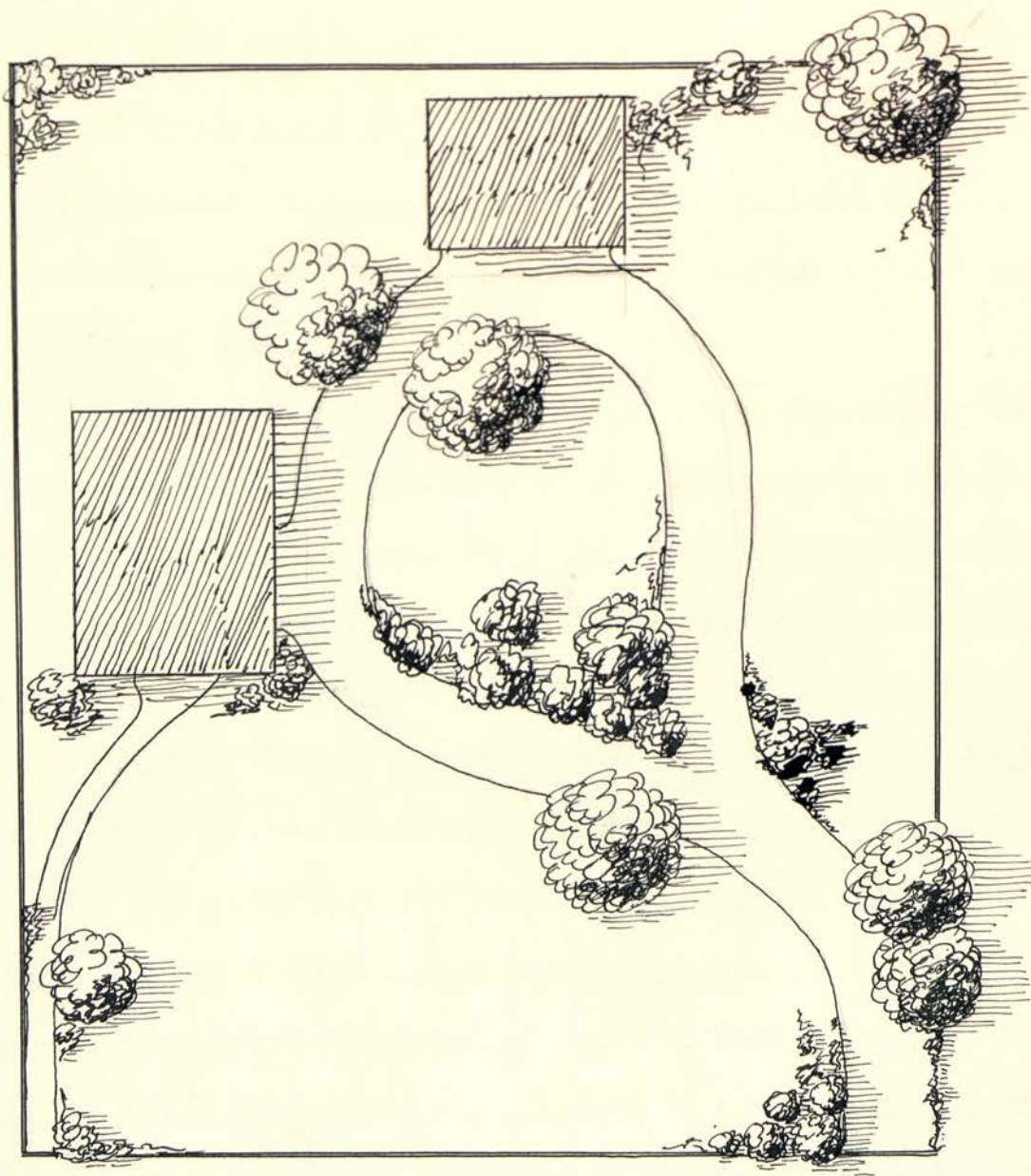
Another common error in the planting of such grounds is the misuse of flower beds. Flower beds are only tolerable at best; but this man places them straight, parallel and symmetrically opposed on either side of the board walk. And his wife comes out, leaving all her good taste behind her in the house, and plants them symmetrically - though she never saw wild flowers grow so - to zinnias, four-o'clocks, marigolds, morning-glories and portulaccas. Or if her means permit, she beds them down to tulips, geraniums and tender coleus.

Now, to point the whole idea of an artificial arrangement, it is usually sufficient to introduce some striking architectural object and have it painted white. A painted bellis, a white-washed rockery or a high board fence may often be found acting in this capacity.

The beauty of any picture depends upon a harmonious

general effect rather than upon any exactness of detail. So there must be a harmonious general effect in a planted lawn; and this depends upon unity in design with taste in the execution. This principle is flagrantly violated in the typical lawn just described. The effect is deplorable in the extreme. The lawns, crowded with trees and cut by rigid, obtrusive walks, look not half so large as the actually are; and, instead of giving the effect of a natural stretch of grass, they look like patches of green in a bed quilt. The whole effect is stiff, unnatural, mathematical, artificial.

Many of these bad effects might be avoided by using so simple a plan as that shown in figure 2. Here the house is placed to one side and further back. This brings the lawn all together. Then the drive curves so as to look less artificial, while at the same time its course allows it to be covered by large trees and low shrubs so that its destination is never seen from the street. The walk does not cut the lawn in two; and this, with the fact that the house is placed as it is, more than doubles the size of the lawn, in appearance, if not in actual feet and inches. The few large trees used are enough to give ample shade and an effect of natural woods. The large amount of shrubbery introduced gives an effect which must be seen and studied to be appreciated. It is safe to say that every attractive residence properly you ever



Street.

Figure 2. Plate II.

J. A. Waugh.

saw was made so by the free and judicious use of hardy shrubs. As compared with large trees on the one hand and with greenhouse or annual bedding plants on the other, they are immeasurably more effective, and to a great extent may take the place of both.

Now as to planting = It is a mistake to suppose that any man who can use a spade can properly set a valuable nursery plant. Indeed it is demonstrated every year in the classes in the garden here that not one farmer's son in ten knows how to take up or to set out the most vigorous nursery stock. Many a man would now be richer had he allowed his trees to be set by some one who understood the business.

The selection of varieties to plant might have been treated as a part of the designing. Such it really is; but in the coils of the prevalent practice the two are distinct, and so are given separate paragraphs here. Now no one but a professional horticulturist can be supposed to have any working knowledge of the hundreds of varieties of trees and shrubs and hardy herbaceous plants available for the effects desired. Even if the property owner designs his own grounds, his selection of varieties to plant must be limited to a mere tithe of those within his reach, or else he must depend on the word of the nurseryman to secure the sorts for his chosen effects. No more radical improvement can be made than to allow the man

who knows the plants, their characters and effects, to make both the design and the selection.

But even the best grounds, planted with the utmost care and with the most carefully selected varieties, may be thoroughly spoiled by the care given them. This is manifested in many ways. Insane pruning is the most noticeable, and may be treated as an example of the whole.

To prune any individual tree or shrub so as to make an attractive specimen of it requires good taste, good judgment, a knowledge of such work and a special knowledge of the habits of each variety pruned. Some of the present practices in tree pruning are hardly to be excused on any grounds. The tree butcher who lives in every town saws off, chops off or breaks off great branches leaving lacerated stubs of several inches' length to mar the tree forever. This man has least regard for pines and cedars. You will see him attack a large, stately, formal Austrian pine whose heavy branches cover its trunk from the ground up (Fig. 3) and it comes off looking like the tissue paper trees that go with a toy farm yard. (Fig. 4.) His cedars fare in the same way. His weeping willows, which ought to be graceful bushes, are trimmed up to a single stem—and this perhaps whitewashed—with a few branches in a bunch at the top, looking like a wrecked umbrella. (Fig. 5.)

But the most disgusting monstrosity is more common



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

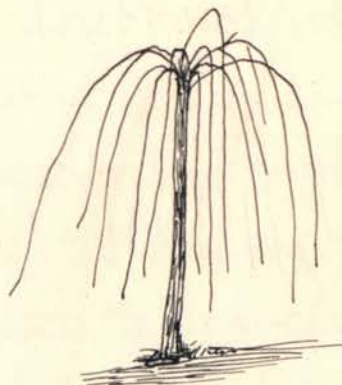


Figure 5.

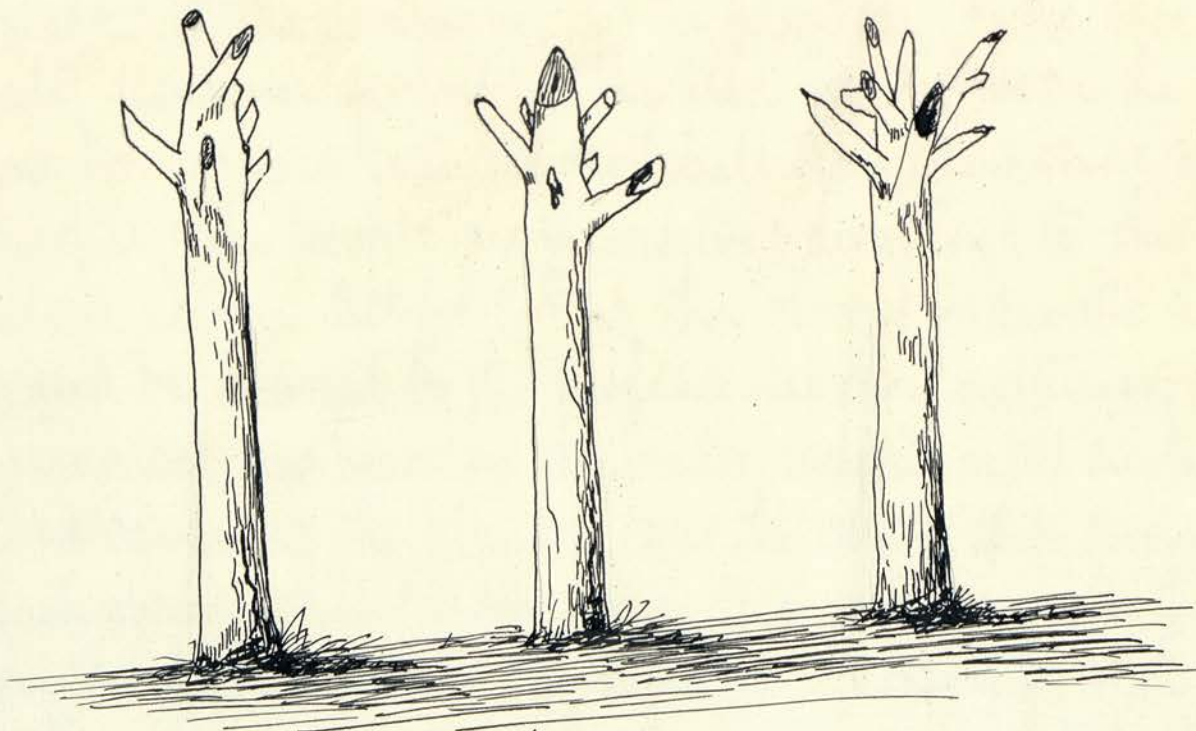


Figure 6.

Plate III.

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yet. In all our western towns, and I doubt not in many eastern villages, you will find what were lately large trees standing in great rows with their heads and limbs lopped off down next to their trunks (Fig. 6) - standing there with their naked stubs of arms raised to Heaven as though to invoke the righteous wrath of the Gods upon the author of this mayhem.

The matter of this paper has been treated under three heads: (1) the designing; (2) the planting; (3) the care of city residence grounds. The plea has not been the usual one for a more extended horticultural education of the people. The people are themselves awakened to this need, as our College testifies. But the ground indicated here must be covered by the professional horticulturist; and the argument has been for the wider recognition of such work. The designing, the planting and the care - each demands such special skill. There seems to be no reason why the art should not rank with law or medicine, or especially with architecture. There is no reason why the man who paints pretty pictures on canvas should outrank the man who helps Nature to paint the beautiful original.

Frank Albert Waugh.