

# *We Wanted a Farm*

**A Back-to-the-Land  
Adventure from 1941**

**M. G. KAINS**

**Author of “Five Acres  
and Independence”**



WE WANTED A FARM

A BACK-TO-THE-LAND ADVENTURE  
BY THE AUTHOR OF  
“FIVE ACRES AND INDEPENDENCE”

M. G. KAINS

We Wanted a Farm  
A Back-to-the-Land Adventure  
by the Author of “Five Acres and Independence”

“Revived Edition”

by M. G. Kains  
Edited by Robert Plamondon

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## FOREWORD

Best known for his classic handbook, *Five Acres and Independence*, M. G. Kains contributed a second gem to back-to-the-land literature: his true life adventures in *We Wanted a Farm*.

Kains shows how he and his family moved from New York City apartments to a full-fledged farm in easy stages: first to a rented suburban house where they grew a large vegetable garden, then in a purchased suburban house where they concentrated on fruits and berries, and finally on a full-blown farm where they went into fruits and berries in a big way. Kains' "Don't quit your day job" approach allowed them to gain experience without betting the farm—not until they were ready.

First published in 1941, Norton Creek Press is proud to bring this charming book back into print.

### NORTON CREEK CLASSICS

Don't forget to read Norton Creek Press' other back-to-the-land adventures: *Gold in the Grass* by Margaret Leatherbarrow and *Ten Acres Enough* by Edmund Morris.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maurice Grenville Kains was born in 1868 in St. Thomas, Ontario. His father was a lawyer. Kains attended college at Michigan Agricultural College and Cornell. He was a professor of horticulture, an editor, a writer, and a farmer. His book, *Five Acres and Independence* (1936) became a best-seller during the back-to-the-land revival during the Depression. He died in 1946 at age 77.



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## A TRIUMPH IN PLOWING

“Who is the best man to plow your garden?” Neighbor Parker repeated, as we chatted one Sunday morning, in the spring. “Harry Crocker is the only reliable man hereabouts; but you’ll not be able to get him until it’s too late. He’s always dated up weeks ahead.”

“Who else do you recommend?” I asked.

“Recommend? Nobody! The trouble is that every spring these fellows get all the work they can handle, so they’re as independent as mules. They’ll promise by everything they hold sacred to do the job at a certain time. But if they start it within a week you may count yourself among the elect, and if they get it done in less than double the time they estimate, you won’t have to break the baby’s bank.”

“But, can’t you appeal to their honor?”

“Their what?”

“Honor. Have they no sense of honor?”

“No more than any other thieves. Why, their honor is scarcely a lean streak in fat pork! They will do exactly what suits them, and you may go hang.”

“Well, how do people get their gardens plowed at all—I mean in time to sow and plant?”

“The wise ones have it done in October or November.”

“In the fall? For spring gardening?”

“Yes. It generally costs less then because you don’t have to harrow. Sometimes the men charge less then, because work is slack. And you have no anxiety if the work is delayed, so long as



it's done before winter sets in. If you leave the furrows rough till spring, they break down easily with a rake."

"That may be all right for next fall," I said, "but we're now up against springtime; so we come back to the original question. How am I to get my garden plowed in time to plant it?"

"Last spring, when Neighbor Haslett was in the same boat, he got Lupton to plow by paying him extra. But that's a hold-up game if anything is—taking advantage of a fellow when he can't help himself!"

"Who are best among the other men?"

"Nobody! They're all poor and unreliable. All except Crocker."

"Well," I said, "I'll bet I get the work done by somebody within a week."

"A week! If you get any of the local men to do it that soon, *I'll* pay for it!"

"I don't want to rob you," said I, "but I'll have the place not only plowed and harrowed, but partly planted by this time next Sunday."

"My offer stands! Do you accept?"

"Yes, but only on condition that against my plowing bill you put up your seed bill."

"It's a go," he said, departing. "Now I can buy a lot of novel-ties!"

On the way to church that same day, I joined Harry Crocker and, after passing the usual commonplaces, told him I'd like to have him plow my garden. "What day can you come?" I asked.

"If the weather doesn't set me back I can come on Friday."

"No sooner than that?" I queried.

"No, sir. That's my first free day. I've promised all the others."

"Can't you shift some of the jobs to come to me tomorrow?"

"No. I've given my word to several other people and they're counting on me."

“I don’t like to wait so long, so I’ll try to get somebody else. But will you reserve Friday for me, in case I can’t?”

“Yes, if you’ll let me know one way or the other by Thursday evening, not later than eight o’clock.”

“All right, I’ll do it.” So we parted.

Later in the day I had similar conversations with four other men, who, respectively, agreed to come on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, provided I would notify the three last on the preceding evening. Lupton agreed to “be on hand at eight sharp, Monday morning.”

Monday came, but no Lupton. So that evening I notified Herron, who had promised for Tuesday. He failed, so I phoned Rafferty. Again a promise and a failure. On Wednesday night, Morgan agreed to come on Thursday, as previously promised. But as he didn’t show up, that evening I notified Crocker, who, according to his promise, arrived Friday morning at 7:30.

He had just made a good start when Lupton and Morgan came down the street from opposite directions and pulled up, each in front of my neighbors’ houses, respectively east and west, and had unloaded their plows and hitched their teams before either realized that the other was headed for the same job. Then they began to discuss which had the right to do it. As they began to warm up, they decided to see me.

Meanwhile Herron and Rafferty had come down the lane from opposite ends and had halted at the edge of the garden. At practically the same moment, all four men caught sight of Crocker at work. An ominous calm was followed by an explosion of profanity, first at Crocker and then at me. I was out of sight but within earshot.

After enjoying the situation until the dialogue began to lose its piquancy, I stepped out.

More fireworks, with considerable brimstone.

When these had burned out somewhat, I said, as blandly as I could, “Well, men, what seems to be the trouble?”

Etna, Vesuvius, Cotopaxi, and Krakatoa erupted immediately in fortissimo quartet! All four men began shouting at once, each to the effect that I had engaged him to do the work, that I hadn't told him not to come, that he had come as soon as he could, that here he was his team and tools, but Crocker had gotten the job away from him.

As soon as I could edge into the conversation, I said: "Now, men, don't blame Crocker. He didn't try to get the work. As you fellows all failed me, I asked him last night to come. If I've done any of you a wrong, I'll make it right. I'll even leave it to you to decide." Then, turning to Morgan, I asked:

"Morgan, what arrangement did you and I make last Sunday?"

"You was to let me know Wednesday evening' if you wanted me Thursday."

"Did I notify you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you agree to come?"

"Yes, but—"

"Did you come?"

"No, but—"

"Did you notify me on Thursday morning that you couldn't come after all?"

"No. You see—"

"Yes, I see, but you kept me waiting all day. Was that fair?"

"Well, I—"

"Did you keep your agreement?"

"No, but—"

"Then, how can you hold me to an agreement when you have already broken your part of it?"

"Well, I hadn't thought of it that way."

"How about the rest of you? Rafferty, isn't your case the same, only worse? You are two days late. Herron, you kept me waiting three days. And, Lupton, it's four days for you. Now, didn't each

one of you break your agreement? I'll leave it to you. If you think I've treated any one of you unfairly, speak up."

Silence. Shifting of positions.

"No complaint?" I queried.

More silence.

"Then," I remarked, "court's adjourned. We'll call the matter closed. Good morning."

All during this colloquy there had been an interested audience of neighbors' wives and others who had been enjoying the situation and taking mental notes with which to regale the Garden Club. When these ladies had finished their narratives, doubtless with appropriate garnishes, the five men had received a lot of free advertising, but only Harry Crocker benefited by it.

## MAXIMUM VEGETABLE YIELD FROM LIMITED SPACE

When we moved to the suburbs, the thing we wanted most was a garden that would supply us with all the fresh home-grown fruits and vegetables for our family of four. Jean also wanted the place to be attractive, so insisted, at the start, on having a large flower garden. However, when we found how small a place we could afford, it seemed that we would be obliged either to curb the family appetite or to buy from the local gardeners or markets. The available area for gardening was only 50 by 75 feet, so we asked ourselves: "What can we raise on such a little lot?"

Well, we not only had all the flowers one's heart could wish, but grew enough vegetables to supply our table liberally during the growing season and through the following winter; for we stored and canned our excess. Yes, we actually had a surplus to can, store and give away! Some of the canned carrots, beets, sweet corn and peas were still available in the pantry when the second season vegetables began to come in—radishes, lettuce, mustard, pepper-grass, and scallion onions.

Except for my own time, and Stanley's occasional assistance, the cost of growing these vegetables included an outlay of about twenty dollars for tools, the most important item of which was about fourteen dollars for a wheelhoe. Besides this, we paid about fifteen dollars for plowing, fertilizers, seeds, and so on. This last item might have been a third less, but I wanted to test a large list of novelties. At the end of the season we still had all the tools and some of the seed, the latter worth about two dollars, for planting the following spring.

Though we kept rather sketchy records, we estimated that, at the prices we had paid for vegetables in New York City, our garden yielded between \$125 and \$150 worth, to say nothing of the better quality and freshness, which gave our products a far greater value. Besides these points, there were the value of the exercise and the pride of producing a large part of our own food. Of course, we had some losses, due to obdurate soil, the wet spring, the dry summer, the bugs and the blights; but there was one loss that proved to be a gain.

I had planted multiplier onions in the outer row on the vacant lot side of the garden. The plants grew well and looked so enticing that some boys, attending a local school, raided the garden one night in order to have an “onion supper.” When we awoke next morning and beheld the devastation, we were angry, but when we used some of the remaining clumps, we found them so inordinately strong that we could not eat them raw but employed them solely to flavor soups and stews. Apparently, the boys had a similar experience and learned to respect our boundary lines, for not once again was our garden molested, though we had radishes, lettuce, and strawberries—products which various neighbors complained were stolen from their gardens.

#### PLANNING THE HARVEST

Much of the profit and pleasure from the garden lay in the distribution of the product to give both variety and quantity throughout the season, while avoiding waste due to planting too much of a single kind or of several crops that reach edibility at the same time. Naturally, this point applies especially to crops that must be consumed promptly to avoid deterioration.

In spite of the carefully prearranged schedule, several of the crops did not behave according to plan. The peculiarities of the season, which was wet in spring and dry during summer, were largely responsible for this. But most of the surplus was taken care

of by canning or gifts to the neighbors, so the losses that might have otherwise occurred were reduced to those few perishable vegetables which can be used only in the fresh state; for instance, peppergrass, lettuce, and radishes (though the last may be cooked like turnips).

In some cases, such as peas, beets, beans, and carrots, a much larger quantity than could possibly be eaten fresh was purposely grown, to supply an abundance for canning while in the peak of perfection. Thus we extended the season far into the winter. No one who cans really first class varieties of these vegetables when in their prime will ever go back to storing such crops as beets and carrots or relying upon the grocer for corn, peas, and beans. Our beets and carrots were canned in early August while small and succulent, before becoming strong or woody. Nevertheless, we stored a few carrots for flavoring soups, stews, meat pies and similar dishes.

Besides the wet spring and the newness of the land, we had some other handicaps. Late spring frost is expected about May 20 where our garden was located, and a similar cold snap about the third week in September. The former came to our unprotected corn, tomatoes, beans, and other tender plants which had been sown or planted too early; the latter repeated the performance, except when we took precautions to prevent frost damage.

We had no assistance from a hotbed or a coldframe that year. However, we bought twenty-five plants each of cabbage and tomato, half a dozen each of sweet and hot peppers and eggplants. All the other vegetables we grew from seeds. In such small gardens it is more convenient to buy such plants than to raise them from seed. The main objection to this latter plan is that if the plants are bought from market gardeners, they are generally of varieties inferior to amateur kinds, being of the coarse texture necessary to stand rough handling in shipment and the markets. This could have been avoided, however, by purchasing the seed and getting

some greenhouse man or friend who had facilities to grow the plants for us on shares.

### SELECTING VARIETIES

Early in January we wrote for seedsmen's catalogs and ordered our seeds. We did this early, to take advantage of the discount, and to get what we wanted before it was sold out, as often occurs with specialties and rarities. First, I used the index of a seedsman's catalog, to have a list of vegetables as complete as possible to choose from. With each name I considered points as the following:

- Do we like it—much, little, or not at all?
- How much space does it require to grow?
- Can we afford to allot that much space, or would it be advisable to devote the area to some other vegetable we like as well or better?
- Can we buy equally or nearly as good supplies of this kind from local truck growers or from the market?
- Does its culture involve fussing, over-much work, serious risk of loss because of bugs, blights, or frost—unless we take special care to prevent such losses?

And so on, the idea being to emphasize the drawbacks and the objections rather than the advantages.

To illustrate some of these questions by examples: We ruled out endive, chicory, and dandelion, because the family dislikes them on account of their bitterness. We like parsnips, leeks, scorzonera and salsify (the last two also known as “oyster plants”), but we omitted them because they occupy the ground from early spring to late fall, and our space was too valuable to spare for that. Still more extravagant of space are pumpkins, sweet potatoes and winter squash, so we discarded them. Irish potatoes were also not included, partly because they use a good deal of space and are injured by bugs and blights, but mainly because good quality supplies can be bought locally.



To grow celery well demands too great an amount of fussing and labor to suit me; besides, we can usually buy good “stalks.”

At first it seemed that we would have to omit four of the vegetables we enjoy most of all; but the inspiration came; American (or Jerusalem) artichoke, when in bloom, is as attractive as any of the other small-flowered sunflowers; asparagus has as dainty foliage as any other plant grown solely for ornament; the leaves of rhubarb are at least as striking as those of elephant ear (*caladium*); and French orglobe artichoke not only has graceful and beautifully colored leaves, but also, when the buds are allowed to open, produces flowers which have few rivals among perennials. With ideals in mind, we placed them to take advantage of their beauty, using them instead of ornamentals.

#### ARTICHOKES

Almost up to the time of growing our own French artichokes, those we had bought in stores had proved so disappointing that we thought this vegetable not worthwhile! Fortunately, however, just before we moved to our first suburban place we ate some home-grown ones at a friend's house and so learned how delicious this vegetable really is when well grown, freshly gathered, and served with hollandaise or mayonnaise dressing. Food for the gods!

We had also heard that the plants are not hardy in our climate. This mistake our friends also corrected. Some plants, they told us, may be killed each winter by Jack Frost, others fail to produce well after the fourth year, but it is so easy and inexpensive to grow or buy new ones each spring for replacements that such losses are scarcely noticed. Not only do French artichokes succeed in the New York City suburb in which we then lived, but I have seen them luxuriating in a private garden near Oswego, New York, a locality far colder.

A fifteen-cent- package of seed sown indoors during early March gave us about a score of sturdy plants which were transplanted to the open ground when the soil warmed up. We kept them growing vigorously and had a fair supply of artichokes during September, the very first year.

To replace those plants killed by winter and those that proved to be inferior, we repeated the sowing each spring. The plants were mostly set in the flower garden in the rear of a border and with a dark evergreen background where their light-colored foliage “stood out” well. Probably not one person in ten who saw them knew what they were, but we had few inquiries until we had allowed some of the poorer ones to bloom. The long-lasting blue flowers which appear in late summer and fall are so exceptionally large and attractive that people would stop to talk about them, so we enjoyed the novelty of having a rare garden vegetable that is also a beautiful plant which bears wonderful flowers!

#### JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE

In our childhood days both Jean and I liked to eat the freshly-dug, raw tubers of the American or, so-called Jerusalem artichoke, but had never been able to buy them at any store or market we visited. They are cooked and served like cauliflower, with hollandaise or cream sauce or cold, as is salad with mayonnaise. The plants’ six or eight-foot stalks bear medium-sized “sun flowers” in late summer. So we planted a clump in a corner. Positively no other vegetable plant demands less attention. As it produces no seed, we started with a quart of tubers. These were badly shriveled, but we set them a foot or so apart where the soil was rich and naturally moist. We left them to shift for themselves: they needed no further attention.

I cut the tops after frost had killed them, but left the tubers in the ground because they shrivel in a few days when exposed to the air. I piled fallen leaves deeply on the patch and held them in place

by the cut stalks. This mulch prevented freezing of the ground, so I could easily dig enough for a week's supply without difficulty all winter. I never had to renew the patch, because, no matter how cleanly I gathered the tubers, enough were always missed to produce a new crop, so the only outlay was for the original quart of seed tubers.

People who have not eaten this vegetable are likely to be disappointed at first because they compare it with potatoes; they should not do so, because the tubers are never mealy.

### ASPARAGUS

Asparagus is another vegetable easy to grow but rarely seen in gardens as small as ours was, because it is supposed to require considerable space, and it does-if allowed to have its own way. But the fact that when home-grown it is so much more delicious than store stuff, prompted us to devote space for one hundred one-year-old plants of the Mary Washington variety, which we fed lavishly. In the third year the plants started to give us far more and far finer stalks than people of moderate means, like ourselves, would feel that they could afford.

As the plants have lacy, ornamental foliage, their corner of the garden was handsomely decorated, especially as they hid the "legs" of hollyhocks which we planted behind them. They also formed a dainty background for medium height flowers planted in front. We scattered cosmos seed irregularly in the bed so that, when it grew up, its long ungainly stems would be concealed, and the plants would be protected from wind.

The ground occupied by asparagus was also made to do other duties. I sowed quick-growing vegetables in the bed in early spring and up to the end of June, when I make the last cutting of asparagus stalks (the old gardeners' rule being to stop when the earliest garden peas in the same garden are ready for gathering). The vegetables I have thus grown at various times include peppergrass,

mustard, lettuce, radishes, spinach and corn salad. I merely scattered the seed of these vegetables sparsely over the surface and lightly raked it in. Could anything be less laborious?

I didn't follow the old-fashioned way of preparing my asparagus bed, but just dug a trench about eighteen inches deep, throwing the earth out evenly on both sides. In the bottom I placed a three- or four-inch layer of manure, covered this with about three inches of earth and tramped it down firmly. On this soil I set the plants, taking care to have the buds pointing upward and the roots well spread out. By walking backwards in the trench I was able to plant easily. The roots of each plant were then covered with not more than an inch of soil pressed down firmly with my feet.

In three weeks, when the shoots began to appear and when weeds were starting to grow in the trench, I worked down enough earth from the sides to make a loose layer about an inch deep. I did not pack this layer down because I might thus have broken the shoots. At intervals of about two weeks I worked down other layers of earth. This method prevents smothering of plants, gets rid of weeds and gradually fills the trench before midsummer.

It is not advisable to cut any stalks the first year after planting, nor to make more than one or two cuttings the year after that; but if frost threatens in the evening when the stalks are only six or eight inches tall, it is better to cut them at the ground surface than to let them freeze, because freezing does them no good and prevents one's enjoyment of them also. With such liberal fertilizing as I gave the plants each year, the bed could easily last from twenty to thirty years; in fact, the one at my grandfather's garden lasted more than forty years and would have continued longer if a hired man hadn't mistaken his orders and plowed it up!

## RHUBARB

Another permanent investment is rhubarb. Victoria, the early variety—at that time most popular—was the one I planted. But a

more recent variety is MacDonald. Its large, thick red stalks are tender and of milder acidity than are those of most other varieties. Half a dozen plants grown in rich soil gave us all the rhubarb we needed for stewing, pies and canning. It is better to buy plants of named varieties than to try growing them from seed, because the former are more reliable and usually begin to yield stalks two years earlier than do seedlings. There is no trick about making them grow. I just planted the clumps four feet apart so their buds were an inch or below the surface and tramped the soil down hard around them. Each spring I fed them as liberally as the asparagus, like which they should bear indefinitely, provided they are not allowed to bear seed.

Just for fun I produced a striking foliage effect, without fuss or coddling, by planting a group of perennials which included one plant of rhubarb in front of two or three French artichoke plants and half a dozen or more of asparagus. This clump needed no alteration except to replace artichoke plants that died. To vary and produce a still more striking effect, I transplanted half a dozen kale plants among these perennials. Kale has lacy green or purple leaves which continue beautiful until Thanksgiving Day or even Christmas. They were started in a little nursery bed in late May.

#### PARSLEY

As an early edging for flower beds I know of nothing that combines beauty and utility so well as the moss curled and fern leaved varieties of parsley. Of course, they produce no flowers, so these plants are perhaps not so desirable as sweet alyssum, dwarf lobelia and ageratum while these last. But because it withstands any weather, resists the blandishments of Jack Frost and becomes beautiful in early spring, it excels every other vegetable plant, except chives used for edging.

As the seed is slow to germinate, I sowed it as early in spring as I could work the ground. To mark the position of the row, I

also sowed radish seeds, two inches apart—in the same row with the parsley seed. In less than a week, the radish seedlings became conspicuous, and, by the time they were ready for the table, the parsley plants could be seen. When these latter were two or three inches high, I transplanted them where needed.

In late June or early July we began cutting the dark green, fully-matured leaves freely and using them fresh as a garnish or to add to salads. We also spread out liberal quantities in shallow layers on trays placed in a warm room or the attic, to dry at ordinary air temperature. We did not use stove heat, as it is likely to be so strong that the essential oil of the plant would be lost and the product thus be worthless for flavoring. When brittle dry, we crumbled the leaves between our hands, sifted out the stems and stored the powder in glass jars with rubber rings. We used parsley in dressings and sauces for chicken, turkey and boiled fish.

## HERBS

In a small area near the kitchen we had a few plants each of thyme, summer savory, garlic, marjoram, tarragon and sage to give us flavors for other meat, poultry and fish dishes. Neither Holt's Mammoth (the best variety of sage) nor tarragon produces seed, so they must be bought as plants. One or two plants of each should be enough to start with. New ones may be grown from cuttings or by pegging down the stems flat on the ground and covering three or four sections with earth about half way between the base of the plants and the end of the branch which must not be covered. The stem should be cut when well rooted, and the newly rooted parts transplanted.

We like to use spearmint for flavoring vinegar and jelly, to serve with roast lamb, and to add to cooling drinks. But as the plants are prone to take possession of the ground and crowd out other plants, we grew what we needed in a wide sewer tile sunk rim-deep in the ground and filled with rich earth.

Chives make a dainty edging with their narrow, onion-like leaves. In late May and early June they are particularly attractive because then they produce an abundance of pretty lavender blooms. Though they may be grown from seed, it is easier and quicker to start with bulbs or growing plants. These may be set six inches apart where wanted. The year after planting, the leaves may be cut with shears, as needed for adding to salads, to which they impart a mild onion-like flavor. Of course, no flowers can be expected from plants that are cut.

#### STARTING PLANTS INDOORS

Okra or gumbo is another vegetable of ornamental value. As it is tender to frost, sowing outdoors is not safe in the latitude of New York until late May, though plants may be started with protection in a hotbed, cold-frame, or greenhouse, and transplanted to the garden after danger of frost has passed.

As the foliage is ornamental and the flowers are attractive, we planted our dwarf variety in the flower border, where each plant was given an area of about three square feet. Some varieties grow five to six feet tall, so they should be placed well back in the flower border.

Other tender vegetables—to be started in the house or under glass and transplanted after danger of frost has passed—are tomato, eggplant and pepper. We found it better to buy than to start these plants in the house.

Two delicious salads we had every spring and fall—two never seen in an American market—are peppergrass (or garden cress) and mustard. In flavor they suggest their botanical cousin, water-cress, which can not be grown in gardens unless the ground is constantly kept damp. As these two plants require cool weather, we sowed their seeds in early spring as soon as the ground could be worked, and again in mid-September, making successional

sowings at intervals of a week until about the middle of May, and again in early October.

Three weeks from the date of sowing we cut the plants with shears. By leaving an inch of stem we forced the roots to develop new tops, and so got a second and even a third cutting from the same plants.

#### INTERPLANTING CORN

As our garden was small, we at first thought we could not have sweet corn because it requires so much space, but I hit upon a plan which worked well, although it made the garden look unkempt. About May 15, using a walking cane, I punched holes an inch or so deep, at intervals of a foot, in the rows of early beets, peas, carrots, and spinach, dropped a couple of plump kernels of Golden Bantam or other small growing variety in each hole, and pressed the soil down firmly over the seed with my foot.

As the early crops had already about a six weeks start, corn did not noticeably affect them, and, as they were gathered before or shortly after midsummer, they did not interfere with the corn, which from that time forward had full possession of the ground. But we had more even than these two crops off the same area, because in early August we scattered seed of globe beets, turnips, carrots, lettuce, radishes, and spinach in various parts of the garden and lightly raked it in. During autumn we gathered enough of these vegetables to make this tactic worth while.

#### PEAS AND BEANS

As we are especially fond of garden peas, and as home-grown peas are far more delicious than any bought ones, we planted plenty of these. We chose none but wrinkled-seeded varieties because these are far superior to the smooth-seeded kind. We also chose kinds



that ripen at different times, from early to late, to have succession, though all the seed was sown at the same time in early April.

This plan works far better than making several successional sowings of the same variety. Late sowings never do as well as early ones, since the ground is drier, the roots do not get as good a start, or follow the receding moisture down to low levels so well. Also, they are more likely to suffer from mildew and red spider, which tend to reduce the yield. Long-season varieties sown early are able to withstand these pests and to yield better than short-season kinds sown two or three weeks later.

Of course we had green and wax-potted and dwarf limas. These were sown after the middle of May because the plants are tender to frost. Only one sowing was made of pole limas, because they require a long season in which to mature. Of the snap-podded kinds we made a succession of sowings at intervals of ten days or two weeks until early August. After that date, in our locality, it is likely that an early fall frost will destroy the plants.

As lima beans often give a poor stand of plants when seed is sown direct in the garden, we soaked the beans overnight and in the morning planted one seed each in two-inch flower pots filled with wet, sandy soil (equal parts garden loam and sand, sifted), the pots being surrounded rim-deep with wet sand in a "flat" (shallow box), kept in a shady place, covered to check evaporation until after sprouting had started, and uncovered, but not again watered or allowed to become wetted by rain.

On cold nights the box was covered with another box to prevent damage by frost. A much better stand of plants was gained by this method than by seeding direct in the garden.

Transplanting was easy to do after the beans had developed their second pair of leaves and when danger of frost had passed. This method also gave an earlier start than plants developed from seed sown in the open ground. It also assured our having complete rows—no blanks—and plants evenly spaced in the rows.

## OTHER VEGETABLES

The vegetables already discussed are the ones we specially desired. We also planted a dozen or so of cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and late cabbage set in blank spaces in the rows during July. These yielded well in the fall. In early spring we had set a dozen or so of early plants in the asparagus bed. The heads were used by mid-summer.

Among the corn, at intervals of six or eight feet, we sowed cantaloupes, cucumbers and watermelons, most of which gave us some fruit, though not as many as if we had grown them by themselves, without the competition of the corn plants.

As summer or so-called "bush" squash plants do not "run" and as we enjoy this vegetable, we had three or four "hills" each of crookneck and marrow squash. These we consider much better than the pattypan varieties, since they are proportionately more meaty and less seedy.

From experience in this or others of our gardens we have proved that there are great differences in the quality of vegetable varieties, some being better for home use and others for market. Even the novice may easily avoid buying commercial kinds by avoiding those described as "croppers," "extra early," "good shippers," "extra prolific," and so on, and confining his choice to kinds described as of high quality.

## HOW WE PLANNED THE GARDEN

In many cases, the time in which each vegetable could be gathered fresh we considerably extended in one or both of two ways:

1. By the of successive sowings of the same varieties, in which case several rows were sown adjacent to each other and the area replanted after the crop had been gathered.
2. By sowing varieties that follow one another in order of ripening, all being sown at the same time.

Perhaps the most striking example of the former is the radish, early varieties of which mature in four weeks or even less. Bush beans, beets, forcing carrots, and early and late cabbage are other examples.

Instances of the second group are peas and corn, the various varieties of which require shorter or longer periods of time to mature.

Though liberal fertilizing and good cultivation helped, our wonderful results were due largely to careful planning and arrangement to save space and keep the ground busy growing crop after crop all season long. Our two chief features of planning were the systems of companion and of succession cropping, which we linked together. We worked these upon the following principles:

Before drawing a sketch or a plan of arrangement, we wrote a small card for each row of vegetables we intended to plant. Below the name was written the approximate date of sowing or planting and the probable date of gathering the last of the crop. Following the name, we wrote the distance between rows of the vegetable itself when several rows were to be sown together. In some cases the distances were a little close, in others a little liberal; but these defects were more than offset by the convenience in working out the sketch, in setting stakes for the rows and in cultivation, for which last the wheel-hoe needed no readjustment to fit irregular distances.

After writing the cards, we separated them into short, medium, and long season groups. Then began a game of solitaire—we had to arrange them to alternate the short, medium, and long season rows, the vegetables requiring various lengths of season, and also those planted early and late. By thus planning, we were able to have one crop follow another and give each season kind increased space just when the plants increased room.

In some cases a short season crop would be removed in late May or early June and the ground it occupied left bare. In others, such rows might immediately be planted with a succession crop;

for instance, onion sets followed by bush beans or some other crop whose seeds must be sown or plants set late to avoid injury by late spring frost. Plants of pepper, eggplant, tomato and okra were set at proper intervals in the rows of lettuce, spinach, or other quick-maturing early crop which continue to occupy the ground only a short time thereafter.

With some seeds that are slow to germinate and with others whose seedlings are difficult to see when they first come up, we sowed radish seed of a dwarf, quick-maturing kind at intervals of two inches or more between seeds. As radish is quick to germinate (usually less than a week) and as its seedlings have conspicuous seed leaves (cotyledons), they are easy to see. Cultivation may thus begin long before it would be possible without these radish row markers. This saved us a lot of work to keep down weeds. It also gave the slow seedlings a good chance to grow. As soon as the radishes were ready we ate them, pulled out and threw the poor ones on the compost pile. The slower-growing plants were not injured by this treatment.

In our first suburban garden we were so short of space that I adopted every plan I could think of to make the most of it. The soil was heavy clay whose treatment I have already discussed but which had not at that time been reclaimed. It had not been plowed in several years, so I looked forward to a fight with white grubs, wire worms, and cutworms, all of which infest sod lands and are inveterate enemies of various cultivated plants. Taking these facts into consideration, I had the land plowed late in the previous autumn, because this practice destroys these pests.

As soon as the ground could be worked in spring, I set strawberry plants 18 inches asunder in rows 24 inches apart. As the plants grew, they were kept well hoed and weeded. The blossoms were also removed as they appeared, to conserve all food for strengthening the plants.

About the middle of May I made small holes, an inch or so deep, with a blunt walking stick, halfway between the plants in the

strawberry rows; in them I dropped two or three kernels of sweet corn and one or two seeds of pole beans, the idea being to have the corn stalks act as poles for the beans to climb on. At intervals of eight or ten feet, a few squash, pumpkin, cucumber, or melon seeds were dropped, the holes closed with a little loose earth and firmed lightly with the sole of my foot. Had the ground been lighter, I should have used my heel.

Between the rows of strawberries I then sowed rows of bush beans. From the start, the strawberries had been kept free of weeds by the use of the wheelhoe between the rows each week or ten days, and an occasional hand weeding around the plants themselves. The corn and beans were similarly kept clean.

I had three reasons for selecting these vegetable crops. First, they had to be sown late to avoid rotting of the seeds and killing of the young plants by late frosts. This allowed the strawberry plants, which are hardy, several weeks in which to make a start. Second, they are quick-growing, shallow-feeding, and short-lived, the corn and pole beans reaching edible maturity during August, and the last of the squash and its kin in late September, when the first fall frost generally comes and kills the vines. Third, after harvest these vegetables leave the ground free, so the strawberry plants would have several weeks in which to grow before winter set in.

As soon as the bush beans had been gathered, the vines were pulled and placed on the compost pile; and when the ears of corn were picked, the stalks that were not supporting bean vines were bent over and broken off close to the ground and also taken away. This treatment effected a saving of moisture and plant food for the strawberries at the most critical time—late summer and early fall.

When frost threatened, what few pumpkins and squashes were gathered, were laid close together but not touching, on deep straw, and covered during cold nights with old carpets, blankets, or sacks, but uncovered during the day when the temperature was well above freezing. Later they were removed to a warm room for

winter storage. The squash vines were burned as soon as the fruits were gathered. After this the strawberry plants were given a weeding.

When the ground froze hard enough to bear a loaded wheelbarrow, I covered the strawberry patch with a mulch of marsh hay to serve over winter. In the spring this mulch was raked between the rows to save moisture.

Then a dressing of nitrate of soda [sodium nitrate] fertilizer, wood ashes and acid phosphate [superphosphate] fertilizer was given the plants. There was a splendid display of blossoms, and, as the weather was favorable during the blooming period, the set of fruit was excellent.

In spite of the crowding by the corn and the beans, each of which yielded abundantly, the strawberries did well, mainly because they were liberally fed and well cared for from the start. The squashes, pumpkins, cucumbers, and melons were almost total failures because the soil was much too heavy for them.

## BLAST IT!

In one of her stories, Mary Heaton Vorse tells of two little boys who needed some words that sounded “bad” but really weren’t. Among those chosen, if I remember aright, their favorite was “blastoderm!” This is merely the name of the tiny membrane that enables an egg to start hatching; but by placing extra emphasis on the first syllable they made it sound delightfully wicked!

So far as this chapter is concerned, I am in the same boat with them, as you will see when you read the next paragraph.

The idea of using dynamite to loosen the subsoil when preparing the ground for tree planting appealed strongly to us because the field where we planned to have our orchard had a “plow sole” hard pan only four or five inches below the surface of the ground, and four to six inches thick. So we felt sure the trees would suffer for want of water almost every summer. Therefore, we ordered a thousand blasting caps and 250 pounds of dynamite, mostly 20 per cent, for subsoil work, but some of it 60 per cent, for blasting rocks in place, “snake-holing,” and similar uses.

Though our order was placed and shipped in ample time to reach us for our planting, a railway strike so delayed its delivery that we ordered a duplicate shipment by calling at the factory at Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey.

Stanley and I, therefore, set out early one spring morning, fully expecting to make the round trip and be back in time for supper. But when we turned from Route 202 at Parsippany, onto U. S. highway 46, we found that the roadbed undulated so violently and suddenly up and down and sidewise right and left (because of the heavy trucking of explosives during the first World War) that we

became panicky about carrying “so dangerous a load over so rough a road.” Therefore, we decided to return home by a safer route.

As matters turned out, it would have been better if we had retraced our steps, for at that time there were no road maps or road signs to tell us to turn right or left or to keep straight ahead, and that day, when we needed help most, there was no friendly sun to help us navigate on our homeward journey.

To judge by the directions we were given at almost every village and hamlet, our informants might possibly have helped us more had they been deaf and dumb or had they talked some foreign language that we couldn’t understand, because we were misdirected over and over again.

Parenthetically, I may say that we had two blow-outs and three punctures (one of them at night!) that did not enhance the gaiety of the trip.

From Lake Hopatcong, our return route led northward to and through Westport, Sparta, Ogdensburg, and Stockholm, to Newfoundland. There, if we had been told to follow State Route 23, southeasterly, we would have come to Butler and Pompton Lakes and thence to Suffern, only seven miles from home. But we were steered northward to West Milford.

Again, had we been told to turn right and go east through Ringwood and Sloatsburg, we could have reached Suffern and been at home at the time planned. But no; we were again sent northward to Greenwood Lake over about twelve miles of as execrable a road as ever pioneers could brag about. Not only was it narrow and full of ruts, but a storm had filled all the hollows, whose depth we could sound only with our wheels, so that, to quote Uncle Remus, we didn’t know “which moment was a-goin’ to be de nex’,” or at which one we might be blown to atoms or plunged into an abyss of mud. In order to avoid one especially threatening quagmire, I steered the car a little to one side—a lot



too much! It crashed into a telephone pole and smashed one of our headlights.

Arrived in the village of Greenwood Lake at nine, we phoned our respective wife and mother, who, needless to say, was almost frantic over our delay. We told her where we were, that we and the dynamite were safe and that we'd soon be home because the road from there would land us just a little way from Tuxedo—only about twelve miles from Suffern. But just as we hung up we were informed that that road had been washed out by the same storm that had developed the lakes we had just been navigating. We were advised to go over the mountain to Warwick.

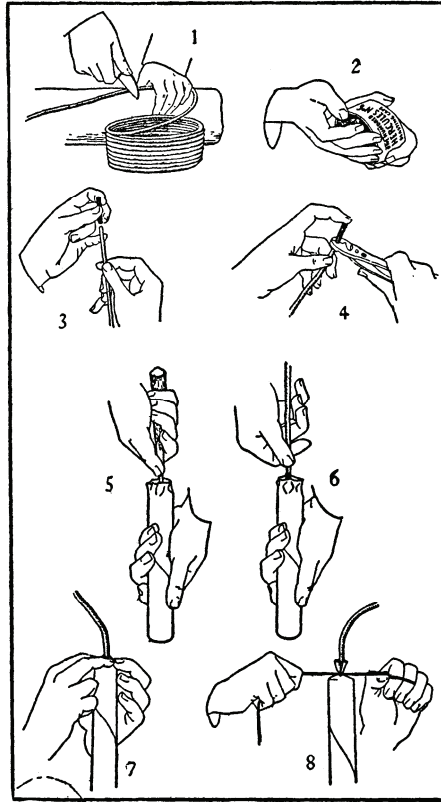
Shall we ever forget that part of the trip! Dense fog obliterated the road except where our single headlight cast a feeble glimmer a few feet ahead of our bumper. We had to crawl up one side and down the other of that steep hill, both of us leaning, railway-engineer-wise, out of window, to avoid pitching off the road down the mountainside or crashing into the rocky wall on the other and being killed either by the fall or by the explosives!

Arrived safely at Warwick, we were directed to Chester, thence through Monroe on New York State Route 17 to Suffern and home, where we arrived at two o'clock in the morning, so utterly exhausted that neither of us awoke until about noon.

If you will trace the route I have indicated on a good road map, you will see that, due to misdirection and the washout, we were forced to travel at least fifty miles farther than necessary—seven hours in pitch-black darkness—practically all of it over roads strange to us and so abominable that they didn't deserve to be called such.

Our neighbor, Dudley, gave us a lesson in dynamiting that I'll never forget—and never apply! Not that his technique was at fault so far as fixing the blasting cap and the fuse to the cartridge was concerned (as we later learned from the dynamite company's booklet) but because he tossed the cartridges like just so many chips of wood and the caps like the jacks that children play with!

Moreover, he smoked his pipe all the time and even lit it while standing over a fifty-pound box of dynamite that he had just opened! I felt rather uncomfortable!



*Figure 9. Preparations for dynamiting. 1. Cut off sufficient length of fuse (never less than 2 feet); 2. take one cap from box with fingers; 3. place cap on fuse; 4. crimp cap on fuse; 5. make hole in end of cartridge; 6. insert cap and fuse in cartridge; 7. fold cartridge paper around fuse; 8. tie cartridge paper around fuse.*

He showed us how to “blow out” one of our big, worthless pear trees. We punched holes with a crowbar in various places until we

found a spot where we could make a “chamber” for the explosive. When the charge went off, the tree went straight up, quivered a moment, then settled down and fell on one side. The roots that didn’t break we cut with a few slashes of the axe.

Following the directions in the booklet supplied by the powder company, we filed a notch on a crowbar, two feet from its “business end,” to punch holes of uniform depth in the soil where we had already placed stakes for the trees. In the great majority of the holes we placed half a cartridge of 20 per cent dynamite prepared as directed, and fired it.

Contrary to our assumption, but as declared in the pamphlet, the earth where we used the 20 per cent powder was not flung high in the air. It rarely rose more than a foot or two; in fact, where one charge seemed to have failed, I went to examine the fuse and had just reached it when the “explosion” came. All it did to me was to raise the soles of my feet, but not my heels, off the ground—just as if I had tilted on them.

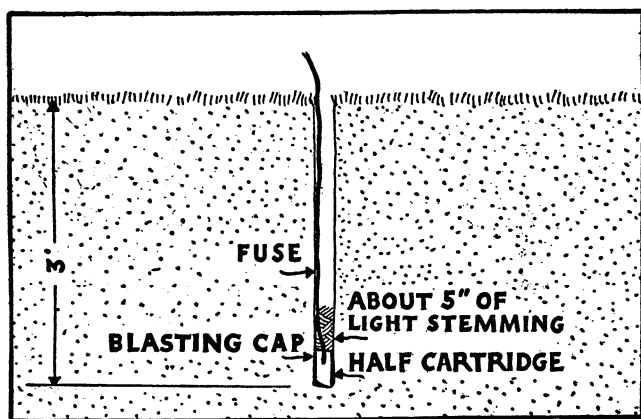


Figure 10. Placing the charge for blasting tree planting holes.

In making this examination I had disregarded warnings of the manufacturers—to wait at least 24 hours before examining the fuse and then making the examination alone, with a wooden tool,

and so carefully that the blasting cap might not be struck by metal on metal, for this would probably explode the dynamite charge with disastrous results.

In a few places we had used 60 per cent powder because of the outcropping rock. In these cases I took the colored soldier's precaution when handling T.N.T.—initials he claimed meant, "Travel, Nigger, Travel!" When the fuse was lighted, we ran to "safe havens" at least a hundred yards from the blast—for blasts they were! Fragments of rock whistled past us.

We were pleased with the ease of shoveling out the soil for the tree planting; we could dig three holes in the blasted ground instead of one where the soil had not been thus loosened. And it was wonderful how the trees "took hold and grew," doubtless because of the deepening of the reservoir from which capillary water rose continuously through the summer.

The only trees that failed were some sour cherry trees whose lower branches had been cut by the nurseryman before shipment to us. Concerning these I had complained to the company when the trees were delivered the previous autumn. After receiving my report of their failure to grow in the spring, the company refunded the amount of that part of their bill. The only cutting of autumn-delivered nursery stock that should ever be done, other than of injured roots, is to trim broken or injured branches to reduce the wounds to the smallest possible diameters; for every wound provides an opening through which the tree will lose its "life blood," and often its life.

Incidentally, I have known only one supposedly reputable nursery that failed to make good when a mistake was really its fault. Several items in that order were ridiculously wrong; a bushy species of crab apple grew into a tree 25 feet high, a pink-flowered ornamental cherry bore white flowers, and some juneberry bushes were actually red raspberry plants! No redress! But that company went out of business years ago.

The man who plowed the area where we planned to have our vineyard, berry and vegetable garden, declared that the ground in one part was as hard to plow as a quarry dump. We should have chosen this place for our cucumbers, for as events turned out we had to dig our parsnips with a crowbar.

He also said he had to plow around some stones because they were too big to move. We almost welcomed this news because we wanted an opportunity (or rather excuse!) to use our high power dynamite for “mud capping.”

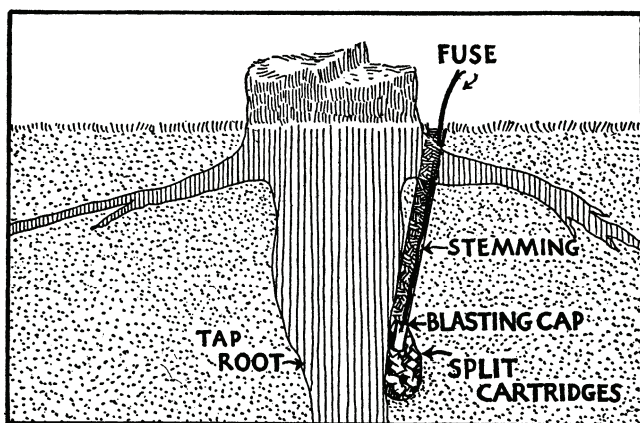


Figure 11. *Blasting a tap-root stump by placing a concentrated charge against the sides of the tap-root.*

Bent on improving this ground, first we brushed the earth off the top of each stone to discover any cracks, fissures, or hollows which we could use to advantage. Next we used a quarter-inch sieve to get rid of stones in the soil which was to be used for the mud cap, because the directions said that these would shoot like bullets when the explosion came. They told the unvarnished truth! After these preliminaries we cut a 60 per cent cartridge in half, split one half down the side and pressed the powder upon a blasting cap and fuse placed in a hollow on top of the stone. Then we covered both with mud made of the sifted soil, next some old

burlap and worthless quilts, and finally, over all, laid a curved cherry log as thick as my thigh. The last item was my own invention, not suggested by the powder company!

I can still see that log hurtling and somersaulting through the air over our old peach tree tops and landing in the barnyard of our neighbor on the left, about 70 feet away!

The shattered fragments of the stone we gathered up in a wheelbarrow.

Our plowman also told us that when the former owner and his father came to a boulder they didn't want to drag away, they would dig a hole beside it and beneath it and tumble it in. But as some of these stones were not buried below the frost line, they would rise slightly each winter when the ground froze. Soil would settle beneath them with each thaw, so each year they would perhaps rise half an inch or more, and, finally, above the surface.

Sure enough I discovered one! While I was preparing the ground for sowing vegetables, my rake struck one that stuck up through the surface like the first knuckle of my middle finger-but on a larger scale! As the rake wouldn't budge it, I tried the pickaxe and then the crowbar. Nothing doing!

Here was our first chance to do some "snake holing." On one side I dug down to the bottom of the stone (which was larger than a sugar barrel), placed a cartridge of high power dynamite with a long fuse beside it, and filled in and tamped earth around both cartridge and fuse. I sent Stanley down the road one way to halt traffic, lit the fuse and ran down the road in the opposite direction. Presently we saw pieces of that stone hurl through the air. None went toward the house, which was only about 50 feet away, but one of our neighbors came tearing over from his place to bawl us out because bits of the rock had fallen on his lawn about 200 feet away and one had landed in his mail box! As a climax to his harangue, he demanded, "What if there had been children in the yard?"

To which we retorted, “What if the old maid had had twins and they had both fallen in the fire and had both been burned up? You haven’t any children—or even a wife!”

That cooled him off and presently we were all laughing about the episode.

As both materials and methods for blasting have been greatly improved since we did our work with dynamite, and as free booklets supplied by manufacturers are fully detailed and explicit, I have not here gone into the details. *I urge all would-be blasters to follow the company’s instructions to the letter.* In our case, by sticking to the manufacturer’s advice, except in the one case I have mentioned, we obtained highly satisfactory results without mishap.