

RHODE ISLAND LAND OF LEGEND & LIVELY LIVING



TWO DOLLARS

YEAR
BOOK
1964-65

THE INTERNATIONAL ORIGINS of our American gardens are what make them unique. They are not like the traditional gardens of the older countries—they have been influenced by foreign ideas and history and they have used and developed the stimulation of new forms and plant material.

It depended, in part, whether the gardens were created in New England or California or in the South. The gardens took their plant materials from the region and the design was English, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese or Japanese, according to the land of origin of its creators. When the colonist had time, leisure and money enough to want a garden for pleasure, he found no indigenous garden forms. But no matter where he came from, there was one basic pattern with which to start—the walled, geometrically designed plot of the Renaissance.

OUR BEAUTIFUL GARDENS

By CAROLYN HAFFENREFFER

This basic pattern is the design upon which the American gardens of the 17th and 18th centuries were constructed. In Rhode Island, the gardens that are still extant and show this influence are Smith's Castle, Wickford, Stephen Hopkins House in Providence, Miss Alice Brayton's Garden in Portsmouth, the Handicraft Club in Providence, and many of the estate gardens in Newport. For the people of the new world, it marked the visible triumph of man over the raw and hostile forces of nature. The neatly patterned formal garden became the symbol of security and of civilized life. This type of garden was in the beginning a great luxury and one of the last of such to be enjoyed in a new country. Mostly, these gardens were away from the house and surrounded by a hedge or wall and one had to walk into it to view it.

At first in America, nature was not considered beautiful, and only until it was neatly tilled and cultivated was it thought of as beautiful. This seems to have been a European attitude toward the landscape, and it was Jean Jacques Rousseau who suggested the concept of nature as being the source of goodness and beauty. England first introduced these new ideas in landscape design in the latter half of the 18th century when Betty Langley and Capability Brown began to forget the formal patterns of the Renaissance garden for the newer informal garden design which tried to conceal man's handiwork.



THE KARL P. JONES' ROSE GARDENS, Barrington—A small part of this seven-acre area, showing roses and clematis. There are also $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres of test gardens, and in all there are 900 different varieties of roses. Mr. Jones is Executive Secretary of the N. E. Rose Society, and received the Jane Righter Rose Medal at Portland, Oregon, in 1964 at the Annual Meeting of the Garden Club of America, Inc.

The concept of this type of naturalistic garden is basically oriental and the "untouched landscape" became a new subject in the Western world, and the patterns of nature were installed. In the United States, these informal gardens did not become popular until the 1830's and 40's. It was called the English style, and this new type of garden brought a new interest in horticulture. The Renaissance parterre depended more on its design and very little on plant material for its splendor and elegance. The English garden first used the herbaceous border with its wide variety of flowering plants arranged for mass display while dramatizing their individual qualities. The formal and the informal French and English have patterned the two extremes of American garden design ever since.

The first plant collectors and the men who established our arboretums and gardens were in and around Philadelphia as early as the 17th century. Their interest and work in plants as plants rather than forms had a tremendous effect upon gardening in America. New special discoveries by Americans were sent to plantations in England and the Continent where they were developed into our own rhododendrons, azaleas, asters and phlox—a far cry from the original stock.

Three new influences in America were to change our gardening life. The first were the horticultural societies which started all over the country: Philadelphia, 1827; Boston, 1829 and New York, 1902. These societies were for the most part founded and supported by the owners of large estates and gardens. The big spring Flower Shows were started, and the

education of people in horticulture and plant material started too. Membership in these societies has continued to grow.

The Garden Club movement has had a tremendous impact upon gardening. The National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., with a membership of 450,000, and the Garden Club of America, with about 10,000 members, outnumber the Men's Garden Club of America with its 45,000 members.

The third factor contributing to the present day status of American gardening is the "Special Flower Societies." One of the oldest of these is the American Rose Society, with 15,000 members.

Throughout its history, American gardens have been conditioned by social and economic forces, and these forces have played a role in their changing design. Economic well-being brought the greatest in gardens to Italy, then France and Spain and England. And all these gardens, except most of the English, have been enclosed. Our American gardens are noted for their openness and outward facing to the neighbors and those who pass. This characteristic trait shows in any prosperous suburb in America today—the whole garden is seen, because the grounds of one house flow into those of its neighbor. This almost uniform garden pattern of ours is an expression of a socially peaceful land, and of an economy that is fairly prosperous and comparatively well distributed. Automobile dominated streets, however, in our modern America are making a return to privacy necessary and the gardens are being planned at the back of the house, or fenced or screened in some way. So here we are back to the walled in private pleasure garden—low in maintenance, and for the principal enjoyment of those living in the house—and often for use as an outside room.

The first gardens in Rhode Island were cultivated by Indian women by means of a primitive hoe fashioned from a long basswood stick and a big clam shell. They fertilized the soil with dead fish—her- ring by the river banks and little mackerel along the shore. They cultivated the land quite extensively, raising corn, beans, artichokes, and growing squash, pumpkins, melons and cucumbers in their cornfields. They grew tobacco, though not the Virginian variety — and in the cultivation of this crop, the men helped their wives. Except for their dogs, no R. I. Indians had domesticated animals, so once the trees had been cut down with stone hatchets and their stumps removed by fire, the Indian women dug up the ground as best they could.

Each family was given about an acre in each of the summer camping grounds of the tribe—more if the family was large; and these "garden spots were laid about with stones," or enclosed with "hedges."

The practice of cultivating fields far apart was an English one in that period. The custom of the R. I. planters of granting house lots of six acres or so to each planter, and of granting also to the same planter "planting ground," sometimes of enormous acreage, anywhere and everywhere all over the Colony, was perfectly conventional, though puzzling to the modern mind. On this, Indian and Englishman thought alike, and this common conception of land usage helped them to live together in fairly peaceful misunderstanding of land ownership for forty years. The Narragansett, Pocasset, Wampanoag, Niantic, Nipmuck and Pequod tribes of Rhode Island gave the early settlers land, crops and labor, and the settlers gave the Indians the hoe and hatchet.

In the Township of Portsmouth in one of the pleasant meadows which lies between Butt's Hill and the waters of Mt. Hope Bay is all that remains of the first white man's garden on the records of Rhode Island. It was probably ploughed and planted by the servants of William Coddington in the spring of 1638. Mr. Coddington not only planted the first

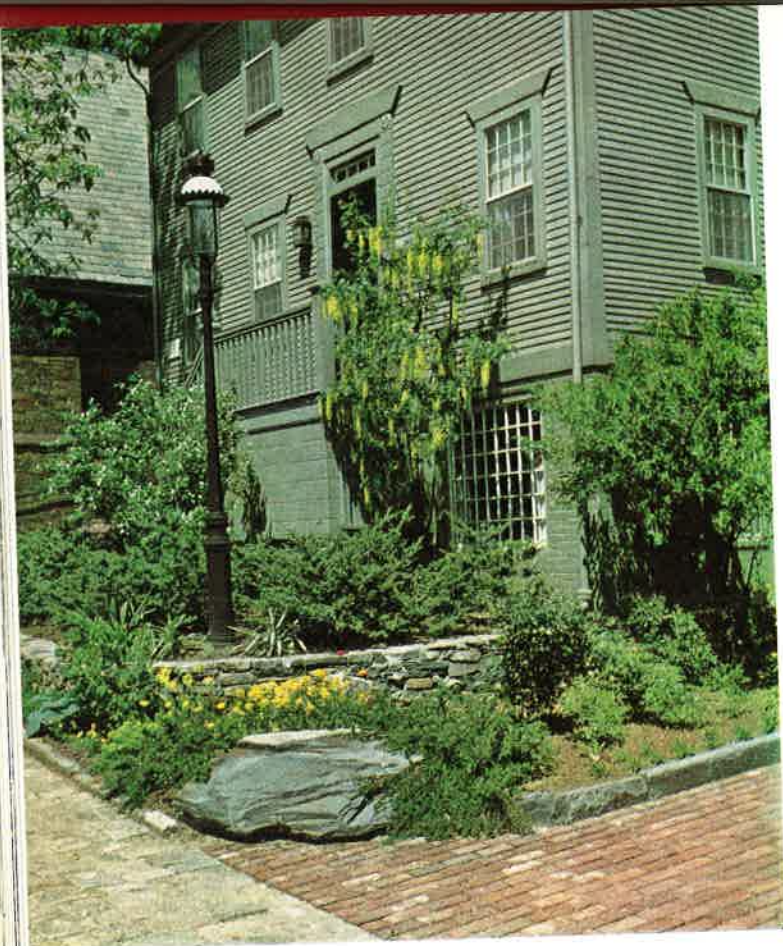
MRS. HENRY D. SHARPE, Providence—The handsome house traditionally French was built for the Sharpe's in 1928. The extensive gardens with French design overtones combine two formal terraces and one garden and three levels of naturalistic trees, rocks, water and plant material. Part of one of the formal gardens is shown above, featuring espaliéd viburnum, standard wisteria, Clematis Montana and tree peonies.

THE HANDICRAFT CLUB, Providence—The Truman Beckwith House (1821-1857)—These terraced gardens, built around the old Carriage Yard and recently redesigned by Mrs. Leroy Elder, were called "Manor Gardens,"—simple parterre beds with sitting and walking areas.





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MR. AND MRS. JAMES C. RALEIGH. Providence—This charming, informal dooryard garden designed in 1962 and maintained by Mrs. Raleigh supplies plant material for her famous flower arrangements, and herbs for the kitchen. Here the restored 1790 house is enhanced by interesting perennials and annuals in yellow, orange and white. The cobblestone courtyard, the Beacon Hill lamp and the large stone which covers a 70 foot well add to the happy blend of well-chosen garden accessories.

white man's garden in R. I., of which we have any record; not only set out in 1639 the first orchard noted in any manuscript of the time, but began, before 1640, what seems to be the first experiment in Rhode Island with tenant farming. His was the first plantation on the Island of Rhode Island, made by a group of Englishmen who came there from Boston under the unofficial leadership of the same "Mr. Coddington, Planter."

In 1767, Mr. Redwood of Newport employed "a man to take care of his garden" at "100 pounds a year." But there is little recorded mention anywhere of any man in early Rhode Island who so limited his activities that anyone thought of calling him merely a gardener, with one exception.

There seems to have been one man in colonial R. I. who was by profession what we today call a landscape architect. His name was Johann Caspar Ohlman and he probably laid out the formal gardens at the Redwood Farms and also the grounds of "Vaucluse" in Newport.

The earliest legislation in R. I. concerned itself, however, not with farm labor—there was after all plenty of that, such as it was, but with farm fencing. The houses of the early settlers were built quickly, just shelters for their wives and children. Their real energy was devoted to the problem of separating their crops from their cattle. Each planter had to fence his own planting ground, orchard, garden and house, and the stock was permitted to wander where it could, earmarked, of course.

The system continued for a very long time. In 1789 goats were a nuisance wandering about the streets of Providence. Earmarks were still being registered in the Portsmouth town records in the early years of the 19th century. And in Cranston, cattle were permitted to pasture anywhere they could, as late as 1856. Stone walls, hedges, fences and some ditches or "water fences," were used.

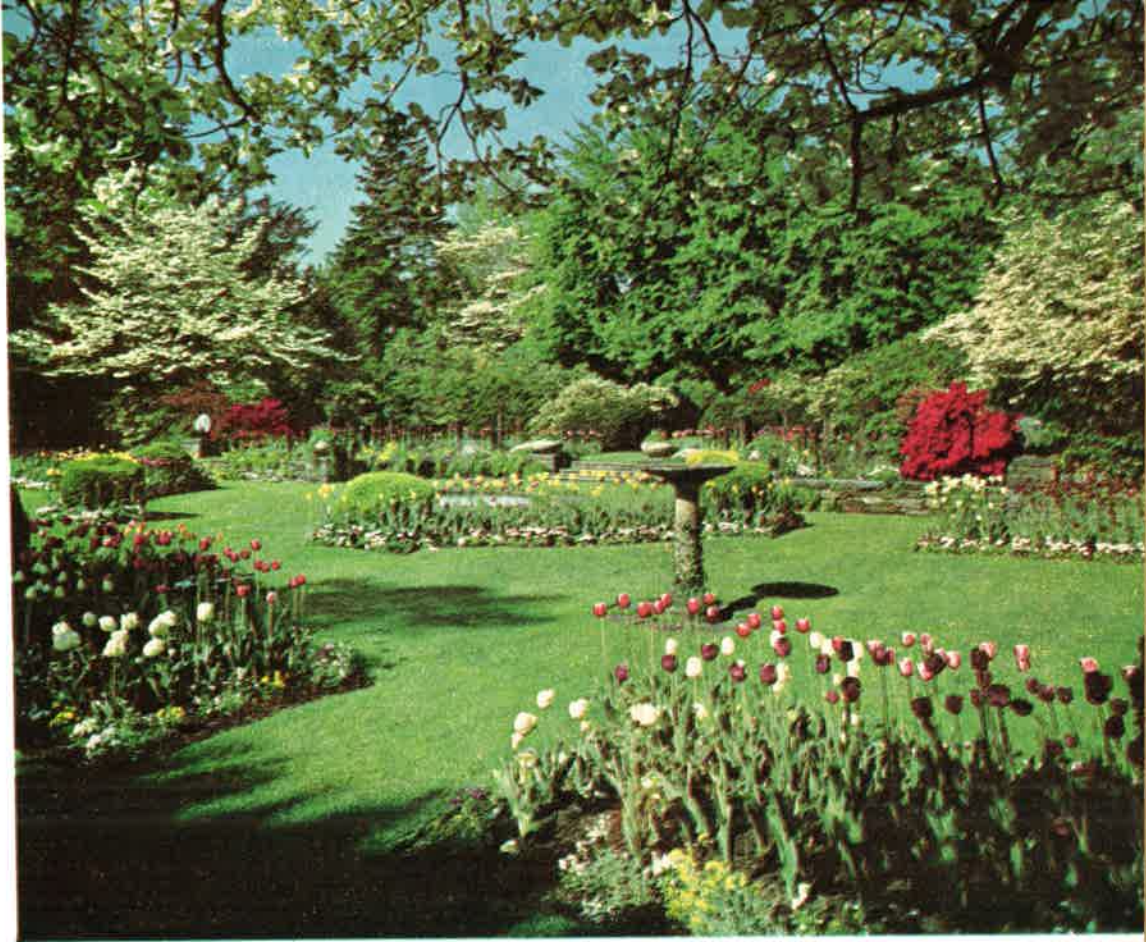
The second recorded garden of the period was planted by Dr. James in Providence on Town Street (at Star Street, between Pratt and North Main) in 1639. These early gardens had beans, corn, tobacco, turnips, wheat, flax, hops, hemp, fruit trees and grapes as produce, with herbs imported from England and gathered from R. I. fields and woods.

In 1785, a daughter of the John Brown family from Providence was given "Spring Green," a part of its Warwick plantation as a wedding present. They laid out pleasure grounds suitable for the formal entertainments of their day. They built verandas, planted boxwood and made a shrub walk, since to "walk in the shrubbery" was the genteel exercise in vogue for the young ladies of the past.

The Gorton-Greene-Roelker Plantation at East Greenwich still has as its oldest garden feature the Long Walk — featuring white blossoms only — planted originally by a young Greene bride a hundred years ago. Later another Greene bride added another garden in the new geometric design and this lovely estate has been in the same family for 319 years.

Other old gardens still loved and tended in R. I. are at "Cocumcussoc," the Richard Smith house in Wickford, the Betty Alden House (1680) and the Richmond Farm (1683) in Little Compton. In Tiverton, the garden of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Marvell, laid out about 1694; in Bristol, the Governor Bradford House gardens (1783) at Mount Hope are more beautiful than ever. The land west of Narragansett Bay has many gardens still flourishing, such as the East Greenwich gardens of Mrs. Arthur B. Lisle, originally created in 1714. Not much is left

MR. AND MRS. PAUL C. NICHOLSON, JR., Providence—The Olmstead Bros., Landscape Designers of Brookline, Mass., designed the first plantings of this extensive and beautiful estate in 1922, and added the Playhouse and formal gardens in 1931. A view of the massed tulips, with dogwood trees in bloom, elegant bronze peacock accessory and small pool add to the distinction of this magnificent city garden.



of the Huguenot Gardens in Frenchtown. They planted fruit trees, grape vines and gardens and probably the wild grape there now began life in America from a plant brought over from France. In Newport, "Whitehall," built in 1729, now restored, has a charming garden designed in the 18th century manner.

Touro Synagogue in Newport was restored and planted with rare trees and shrubs some time after the Revolution by Abraham Touro. On the Day of Pentecost in 1773, it was noted in a diary that the whole interior of the Synagogue was hung with wreaths and garlands of spring flowers.

The campus of Brown University was the house lot of Chad Brown, Planter of Providence in 1636, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Providence in 1642. The Reverend James Manning, D. D., who came up with the young college from Warren as President to Providence in 1770, grew potatoes, melons and other fruits and vegetables on the present campus. Melons must have been grown because in June, 1783, the R. I. Legislature passed a law, "An Act to Prevent Melon Stealing."

In November, 1833, the following entry was made in the records of Trinity Church in Newport: "On a motion of Ed Brinley to ornament the church yard with trees, VOTED, that the wardens be authorized

to purchase and have set out as many of such kinds of trees as they may esteem best."

Peleg Sanford, Governor of Rhode Island, wrote in 1680 when answering a questionnaire sent out by the English Board of Trade: "We answer that as for Merchants, we have none, but the most of our Colony live comfortably by improving the wilderness; that the great obstruction concerning trade is the want of Merchants and men of considerable Estate among us." The Reverend Jacob Bailey in 1751 wrote in his Journal, when traveling about New England: "Providence is a most beautiful place."

Between these dates, the merchants and the men of considerable estate at last arrived and made Providence and indeed all the towns about Narragansett Bay, "most beautiful." There was much prosperity before the Revolution, and the merchants of Rhode Island built a number of substantial brick and frame houses with the usual garden leading out of the house on the sunny side. To mention a few—in Providence, the Sullivan Dorr House, Carrington House, Nightingale House, Crawford Allen House, the Varnum House in East Greenwich, the Babcock Mansion in Westerly (1736), and the really great country house, "Malbone," built on the Island of Rhode Island in 1741. The town house of Metcalf Bowler still stands on the corner of Mary and Clarke



MISS ALICE BRAYTON—"Green Animals"—Portsmouth—This famous old estate, originated in the 17th Century by the owners, has been developed in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries by the same family. Its privet topiary figures and shapes are still carefully manicured, the parterre gardens planted in 1810 keep their clipped pattern; the fruit trees and currant and gooseberry bushes yield abundantly, and the perennials and annuals are a riot of color. The old-fashioned roses are unusual and fragrant.

Streets in Newport. Abraham Redwood, Merchant, at his town house in Newport, is said to have had a botanical garden, the first in New England. In it and in the hot houses grew all sorts of West Indian fruits and flowers.

To continue,—the Eldredge Garden in East Greenwich, planted about the year 1757, when the old Colonial house to which it belongs was built; the Brenton place called "Hammersmith Farm" on Brenton's Neck in Newport, built about 1667; the Taylor's of Ochre Point in Newport; the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House in Newport, a restored 17th and 18th century house and garden, and the Bowers Gardens in Somerset, laid out about 1838.

A summer house built in 1800 by Charles DeWolf of Bristol for his great house and formal gardens near Constitution Street was moved to "Linden

Place" on the Main Street, where it may be seen today. Case Farm on Poppasquash in that same town has a newly designed garden within the enclosure of the old walls of the original garden, and in Bristol also is the Governor Bradford House, built in 1783.

After the Revolution, the great house of this period in Rhode Island was "Vaucluse" in Newport, owned by the Honorable Mr. Elam. William DeWolf of Bristol hired Russell Warren to draw plans for an imposing house on Poppasquash in 1808. Later this house was called the Middleton House. In 1798, Susan Reynolds DeWolf created a lovely 18th century garden to the west of a farmhouse in Bristol near Mt. Hope Bay. The Babbitt Morice Garden laid out in 1835, also in Bristol, was extensive and beautiful.

Such is our heritage of many beautiful homes and magnificent gardens of the past.

The planners of the present day gardens of Rhode Island use formal or informal designs, whether they are large or only a doorway spot. They have thought of maintenance problems and of space permitted, and endeavor to tie in the garden as an integral part of the house.

The 2400 members of the R. I. Federation of Garden Clubs, Inc., have concerned themselves with landscaping public buildings, streets, commercial and industrial establishments, hospitals, railroad stations and numerous other locations and in many ways have contributed in developing a new and better look to the thirty-nine cities and towns of Rhode Island. Our businesses and industries have also learned that it is good advertising to keep Rhode Island clean and beautiful.

"A garden is a lovely thing, God wot!" and Nature is happy to go all the way, from a plant pot to a park.

AVICA (William D. F. Morrisson, President), Middletown—One of the handsomest examples of the new trend in gardening—to make the sites of business and industry attractive additions to the communities in which they are located. The late Adelaide Whitehouse Millar designed the rose plantings in 1954, and the employees of AVICA are enjoying the benefits of this thoughtful and beautiful outdoor setting. Other industrial plants would do well to follow this example.

