

GARDEN PROBLEMS

by Walter S. Merrill
December 1929

THE GARDEN CONTEST

In the *California Garden* of September last, I spoke of the opportunity which I had had of accompanying the judges in the Garden Contest on their rounds of inspection. Now that the contest is closed for the year and the awards have been made, I wish to comment somewhat at length on the contest as a whole and on certain features of the gardens, good and bad, that impressed the judges most.

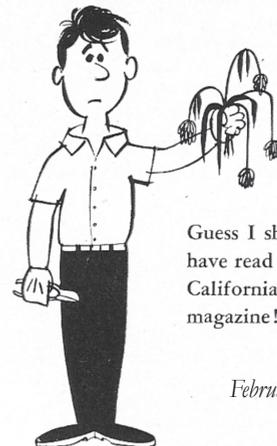
In August, 1928, Mr. Frank Strausser and Mr. John W. Snyder, each quite independently of the other, conceived the idea that a Garden Contest would be a good thing for San Diego. These gentlemen spoke to me about it, and I acted for them in suggesting the advisability of such a contest to the Floral Association. Later Mrs. Greer asked me to act as chairman of the committee in charge of the contest. It was decided to offer silver cups to gardens of three sizes: Small Gardens, of not more than 7,500 square feet; Medium-sized Gardens, of from 7,501 to 22,500 square feet; and Large Gardens of any size above the latter figure. The cups are to be held for a year by the winner, and to be held permanently by entrants winning three times.

Initiating such a contest is plain, hard work. People generally dislike to enter their gardens at the beginning. Some are over-modest; some are over-sensitive; and others are just not interested. However, fifty-four entries were secured, which was at least double what I expected the first year. Of these, eleven were in the large class, twenty in the medium and twenty-three in the small. The gardens were inspected in May, August and November, each inspection by a separate set of judges who were highly capable and experienced gardeners from out of town. These judges scored the gardens independently, according to a scale of values fixed by the committee, and the scores were averaged and the awards made in accordance with these average figures. If the resulting decisions are criticized, it can be only on the grounds of the choice of judges. As all but two of these were professional gardeners, and as these two have had very long experience in their own and other gardens, I feel that no more fair way of awarding the prizes could be arranged.

The judges felt that it is a mistake to make more than one inspection, - that the Spring is the best time. I shall recommend to the committee for 1930 that this change be made. The gardens did not score at all well, with a very few exceptions, in August and November. However, it maybe stated here that the number one gardens in all classes, as determined by the final average, were the same as the number one gardens in the May inspection. But not one of the winning gardens was first in all three inspections.

The most conspicuous fault in the gardens as a whole was the lack of foresight shown in the original planning. A garden put together anyhow, without thought for what it will be when the trees and shrubs are grown, cannot, in the eyes of experts, compare favorably with one which shows careful designing. This is brought out very plainly in three contestants for the Best Planting around an Industrial or Commercial Plant. Two properties of the Gas Company (at El Cajon and Boundary, and at Fourth and Ash) are very attractive with their planting of shrubs and trees; but the space allotted to them is nowhere big enough for mature plants of the varieties chosen, and in two or three years more they must be replaced by smaller specimens. The judges considered that very poor planting indeed, and awarded the prize to the planting in front of the plant of the Original French Laundry, which is suited to the style of architecture and which will grow better and better as the years go on and the plants reach maturity. However charming it may be, and however great a source of pride to its owner, a poorly designed garden immediately reveals itself as such to the expert gardener. Gardens which stood out as conspicuously well-planned are: Small, Mrs. Edelen, Mrs. Mulkey and the Misses Schwieder; Medium, Mrs. Evans; Large, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Marston. These six gardens indicate that much thought has been spent on other matters than the growing of fine plants and the securing of a quantity of colorful bloom.

A wall around a garden seems to make little difference in the value of the garden to the neighborhood. Those scoring highest for this were those of Mrs. Edelen, Mr. Marston, Mrs. Evans, Mr. Strausser, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Dunning, and in every case the real beauty of the garden is hidden from the public by wall, hedge or close planting of trees and shrubs. Only hints are given of the treasures inside. ■



February/March 1970

