

# *Municipal Rose Gardens*

*By Walter Easlea*



THE risk of appearing over sanguine I may say that, in my opinion, every municipality that can maintain a public park will, in the near future, also possess its public Rose garden. My belief arises from what I have seen regarding the Public Rose Garden at Westcliff-on-Sea, of which I shall speak further on.

No one can deny the immense popularity of our national flower, but alas, many thousands of the inhabitants of the British Isles possess such meagre gardens, or maybe none at all, that their love of the Rose is at present limited to what they may see in others gardens or at the Exhibitions.

Probably the carnation or chrysanthemum enthusiast will ask "Why not a municipal garden for their special flower?" My reply to that would be that the Rose is our national flower, and as such must be accorded the pre-eminence. Moreover, is there any hardy plant of which we could make an exclusive garden that can compete with the modern Rose? And the establishment in every suitable locality of a public Rose garden would afford pleasure and instruction to multitudes.

I say instruction, because I can conceive of nothing more helpful to a would-be Rose grower than to visit the public Rose garden of his own district and obtain lessons in preparing the soil, planting, pruning, and cultivating the Roses and selecting the varieties that he likes best, which he can see flourishing, and thus gain more useful information by a few visits than he would from the perusal of dozens of books, with all due apologies to their able writers.

When such gardens are well established the National Rose Society might be able to use some as trial grounds for novelties, but of course that is merely a suggestion,



I am sure there can be no better agency for the popularising of a good novelty than a public Rose garden. When American Pillar was first introduced, realising its value, I presented a specimen of this Rose to the Public Rose Garden at Westcliff-on-Sea, and from my own knowledge that plant was the means of inducing scores of people to plant this variety, people who would never think of going to a Rose Show or study a catalogue. From the illustration on opposite page, one may gather an idea of the beauty of such a specimen, which also displays the cultural skill accorded the Rose by the able Superintendent, Mr. Little.

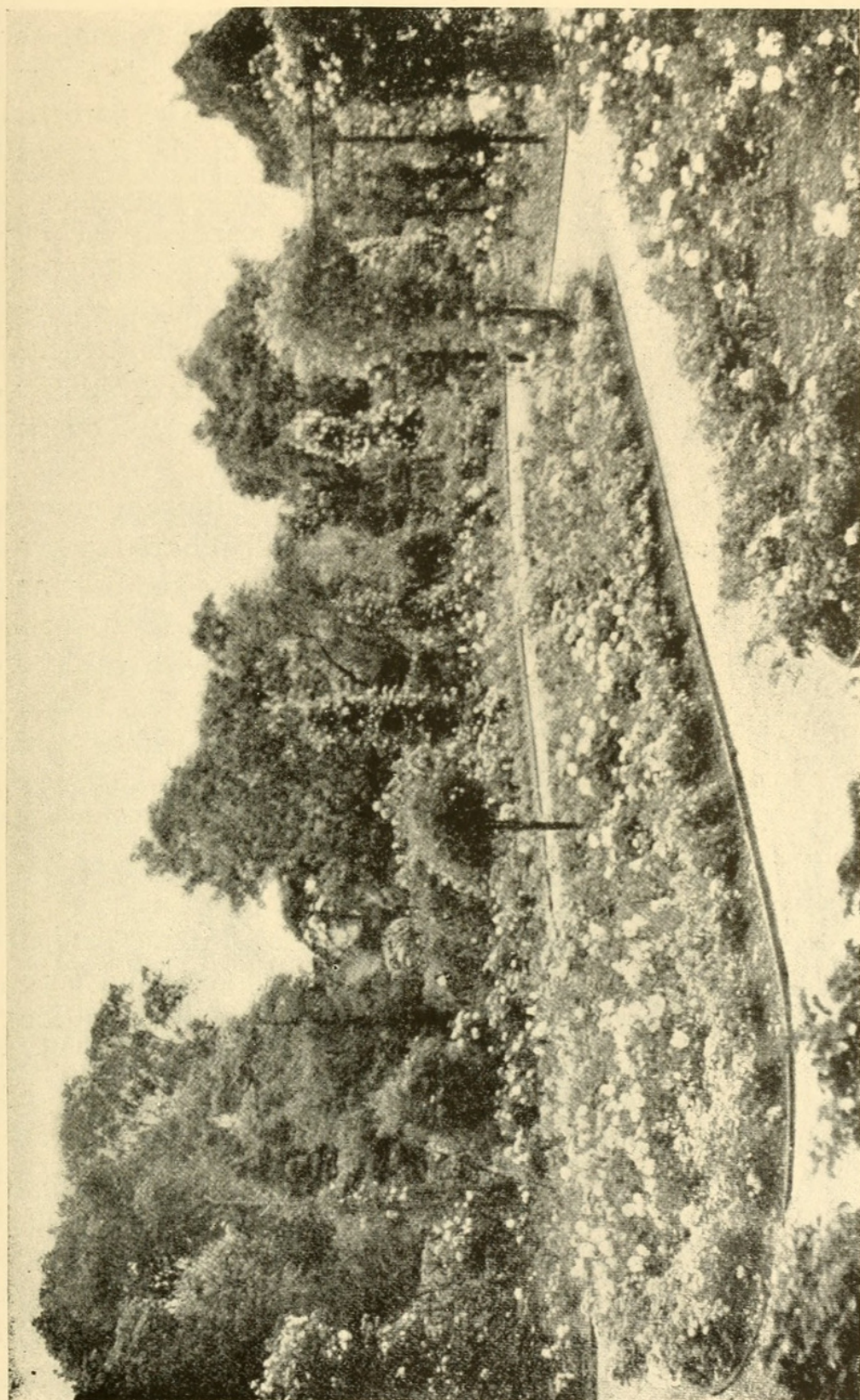
Another useful purpose to which public Rose gardens could be put would be the possibility of utilising them for teaching the rising generation the art of Rose growing, a fact not to be ignored by educational authorities, for if children be given a healthy love of the beautiful, and especially for their national flower, who can limit its far-reaching results?

At present I believe we are far behind America as regards public Rose gardens. In some districts they are being established upon a very lavish scale. The City of Seattle, I have been told, is like one vast Rose garden, and the authorities spend large sums to maintain their upkeep. The American Rose Society have a Test Garden at Elizabeth Park, Hartford, Conn. It is owned by the City of Hartford, and all the work connected with it is under the supervision of the park gardener. It is laid out in fine style, enclosed by hedges of Roses, and contains a Rose temple. Thousands of people visit this garden in the month of June.

I was much struck by the interest taken in the Roses in the Public Park at Lyons, a city that abounds in Rose nurseries, and here one could find some rare old sorts that are now almost forgotten by us; sorts that probably are not even grown by the French nurserymen of the present day.

At our own beautiful Kew Gardens the Roses always attract large numbers of visitors, but I have often thought it a mistake that the Roses are not located together in a well-designed Rosary, rather than scattered about the gardens as is now the case.





PUBLIC ROSE GARDEN  
WESTCLIFF-ON-SEA.



I believe there is a plantation of Roses at Purley that the public have access to, and there may be others in other parts of the kingdom, but certainly the best public Rose garden I have met with is at Westcliff-on-Sea, founded by the Corporation of Southend-on-Sea.

A full description of this Rose garden appeared in the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, August 29 of last year [1914], and I am indebted to the Editor for the use of the photograph which appears herewith. It forms a part of the pleasure grounds attached to Chalkwell Hall, a property of some 26 acres, which the Corporation acquired in 1903 for the sum of twenty thousand pounds.

The Rose garden, planted in 1908, is about half an acre in extent. It contains nearly 2,000 plants—tall pillars, weepers standards, bushes and hedges, and comprises all the best and up-to-date varieties. On Sundays and special days during June, July and August the garden is crowded with residents and visitors, and note books are as plentiful as at Vincent Square. All the Roses are carefully labelled with Acme labels. The luxuriant growth is a wonder to behold, and when in a good soil, such as abounds all over the district, it would appear that Roses revel in the sea air, which is manifest from the ripe condition of the wood.

It may be thought that war time is hardly a fitting moment for introducing the subject of public Rose gardens, but surely no harm can be done if the suggestion finds favour with local authorities, and I would ask all local secretaries to use their influence towards establishing such gardens in their own districts, and perhaps in some places the conclusion of peace, when it comes, might be celebrated by the establishment of a public Rose garden.

Public Rose gardens should be easy of access, although in crowded districts it would be advisable to plant in the suburbs. If land is very expensive a smaller area than half an acre might suffice, but I do not advise much less. Of course in many localities the land is already in the possession of the authorities, and the site could be obtained in many cases either by enclos-



ing a plot of the grass land, or it may be by discarding some shrubberies, as in the case of part of Chalkwell Park.

With all due respect to surveyors, I would strongly advise that the details be left to a committee of Rose growers, and local secretaries might help in forming such committees. At Chalkwell Park the authorities had the advice of Alderman Martin, a Rose grower of local renown, and in practically every district there may be found gentlemen well qualified to advise as regards site, preparation and selecting the varieties.

Friendly rivalry could be encouraged by offering cups or medals for the best designed Rose garden, and also for the one best cared for. In many localities the local Rose Show could be held close by the Rose garden, and thus afford the public an additional pleasure. Data relating to varieties best suited to each locality and other details would be of the utmost value to all who study the Rose and its culture.

In conclusion, I have just a word to say as regards our public parks in London and other large cities, where the conditions are not favourable to Rose growing.

I would suggest that a Rose garden be laid out, the beds being filled with bulbs for the spring and then with Roses for the summer. Plants from the open ground potted up into eight-inch pots in October will yield grand blossom the following summer. The plants could be grown in pits and brought on ready for plunging in the beds in June, and removed again in late autumn.

This is done already in some parks, but instead of locating the beds here and there, if arranged altogether the effect would be better, and the public instructed thereby as to grouping and other details. It is a simple matter to grow ramblers, weepers, and standards in tubs, and surely they deserve as much time and trouble as many of the subjects we find in our public parks during the summer. At least they would be far more natural than exotic things such as palms and castor oil plants.

I hope from the wide publicity of this publication that the authorities concerned in establishing garden cities will bear



in mind the suggestion of forming a public Rose garden. With them it would not be so arduous as in old established boroughs where land is difficult to secure, but it may be some public-spirited residents of even such boroughs as last mentioned may see their way to offer sites for establishing a public Rose garden, and thus help to create an even greater love for our national flower.



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