

A HOUSETOP GARDEN FOR SUMMER

By Ella Rodman Church

HOWEVER close the atmosphere may be near the street there is always a refreshing purity and coolness higher up. A certain flat roof in a neighboring city has been turned into a roof garden. The roof itself was first treated to a covering of concrete, and then fitted up with a rattan lounge and easy-chair, a low rocker, two or three foot-cushions, two or three inexpensive but effective rugs, some Chinese lanterns, and a small table or two—the latter intended to hold the lemonade or ice water and the after-dinner coffee service. Of course, all these things had to be taken in every evening in case of rain or storm, but even that trouble seemed trifling when compared with the pleasure this garden gave. The nightly study of the heavens from so high a point of view became a never-ceasing interest, and the sweet odors of old-fashioned flowers, intensified by the night air, added the finishing touch of enjoyment to the whole. Some expense and trouble were involved, as a matter of course, in getting even a simple garden into working order where gardens are not expected to be; but even this was accomplished.

THE wall was the brick of the house next door, which rose some little distance above the roof; to it long, narrow boxes supported on brackets were fastened. There were plenty of spaces between the boxes, as the garden was not intended to be on a large scale. When supplied with proper drainage and well-prepared soil, the plants, which had already been started elsewhere, were carefully deposited in their new and strange quarters. Mignonette, which is an especial favorite with the mistress of this roof garden, shed its sweetness everywhere, while a box, bordered with white Alyssum, and three low scarlet Geraniums in the centre, supplied what the other lacked in color. This was called the beauty box. The boxes and brackets were painted brown.

In one corner there was a perfect bower, called the chair of state, for the honored guest or whoever was deemed most worthy of it at the time. This throne was a rustic seat with a red cushion, and a footstool covered to match—the drapery being composed of the thickly-matted foliage of the most aspiring of Morning-Glories trained in a pointed dome lavishly decorated with pink, blue and white bells. It was a charming retreat, and the sovereign of the moment sat in great state surrounded by laughing courtiers on hassocks, mats or whatever could be utilized as seats. Every one enjoyed the novel idea, and became more intimately acquainted than ever before with the rich beauty of Morning-Glory foliage in its summer perfection.

Among the wall decorations were quaint little birch bark "catch-alls" filled with growing Ferns. Rustic stands with their burdens of beauty stood in each unoccupied corner. There were beautiful Roses running through all the shades of color and perfume of which Roses are capable—making perpetual June, and blooming as though each twenty-four hours were "the one day of summer in all the year." Some were climbing Roses that had come to stay, and some lovely blossoms were set in moss. Their beauty and luxuriance were a constant source of wonder, and the direct rays of the sun, tempered by abundant moisture, certainly seemed to agree with them.

VISITORS exclaimed almost as much, and with equal cause, over the Verbenas. Such masses of bloom and beautiful coloring are seldom seen, and many of them were sweet-scented at night, the time when the garden parlor was most in demand. The white variety is always fragrant, and all the light-colored ones, if raised from seed, become so. The Petunias, too, white, pink and light red, without the ugly purple tinge that so often spoils them, with some rare striped ones, took on new varieties of beauty, and more than repaid the care bestowed upon them. These tropical flowers fairly revel in strong sunshine, and most plants flourish under it if abundantly watered when the sunlight is withdrawn.

It was something of a task to water this aerial garden, and the youth who brought the pails of water from the bathroom in the second story had his own private views as to the desirability of roof gardens; but the vines waved their graceful tendrils, and the flowers put forth their beauty irrespective of adverse opinions. Some one asked if any fertilizer were employed to produce such remarkable bloom and brightness of coloring, and the queen of the domain replied laughingly: "We are all coffee-toppers, you know, and having read or heard somewhere that our favorite beverage agreed wonderfully with flowers we treat them regularly to the leavings of the coffee-pot and the grounds. That is all."

"And what do you consider that this very unconventional departure has cost you?" I asked. "Including the furniture," was the reply, "about eighty dollars—a mere fragment toward a summer outing. Next year the expense will, of course, be materially less."