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ROCKERIES



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ROCKERIES

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The word "rockeries," for the purpose of this leaflet, is applied to any landscape development that includes rock arrangement as part of the design, such as rock gardens, rock borders, rock walls, etc., and the term "rock garden" is restricted to true garden areas in which rock arrangements are included as an important element. (Figs. 1 and 2.)

The problem confronting the would-be possessor of a rockery is to determine the plants that are likely to succeed under the conditions



FIGURE 1.—A garden near Stockholm, Sweden, in which rocks are used as the principal background

that can be provided. There are no plants that can be counted as rock plants in every part of the country; therefore plants must be selected for the particular locality where they are to be grown and with regard to the habits of growth that make them suitable for that particular locality.

Rock Gardens

The background or setting for the rock garden varies greatly, because of the topography and character of the country and not because of the latitude. In a rough, rocky country rock-garden sites are sometimes found almost ready-made (fig. 3), but in other sections they must be created from materials collected for the purpose (fig. 4). In the latter case great care is necessary in order to produce a

result that does not look forced or out of place. When building a house on a rocky hillside it may often be possible to reserve an adjacent area that, with but little modification, may be made into a most attractive garden. Even old quarries can be and are converted into attractive gardens. Where, however, such features have to be built, it takes a good student of nature to reproduce naturalistic rock ledges and other stone outcroppings. Boulders (rounded, water-worn stones) may be scattered over a gentle slope, whereas on a steeper slope the stones must be placed closer together, at some points even resting on one another. Even rock walls may be part of a rock garden.

Rock Walls

Quarried or angular field stones often may be appropriately used to hold artificial banks. Stones with weathered faces are usually more attractive than those with newly cut or broken faces. Where there is a gentle slope, a row of stones may be placed at the bottom, with spaces between them two or three times as wide as the stones; other stones may be placed behind these spaces with the bottoms as high as the tops of the front stones and back far enough to hold the soil at the desired slope. (Fig. 5.) Where the bank is steep the space between the stones, often only 2 or 3 inches, may be filled with soil and the next stone laid over this opening, resting on both the lower stones and set as far back as the desired slope of the wall will permit. Stones should not be uniform in size, and those more irregular in outline than is desired for building purposes make a more attractive wall. (Fig. 6.) If the stone has a relatively flat upper surface, the surface should be so placed that water falling on it will drain back into the wall and not off.

Sometimes walls are laid in mortar, with vertical faces but with holes through them here and there. When these holes are filled with soil, roots can penetrate behind the wall and find an adequate feeding ground.

Drainage from the area above the wall must always be provided. Sometimes the water from this area is carried around the rockery;

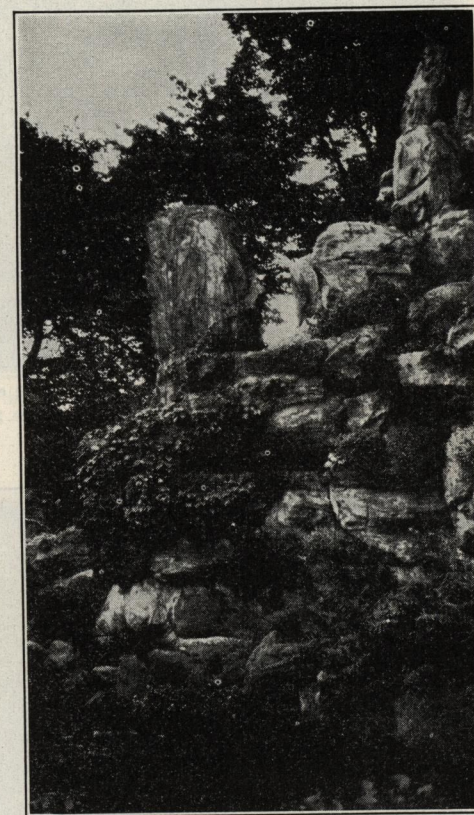


FIGURE 2.—Rock development on home grounds, beautified by planting



FIGURE 3.—Natural rock setting that could be easily adapted for a rock garden



FIGURE 4.—A rock garden built in a flat country where it was necessary to bring in the rock and to build the hills

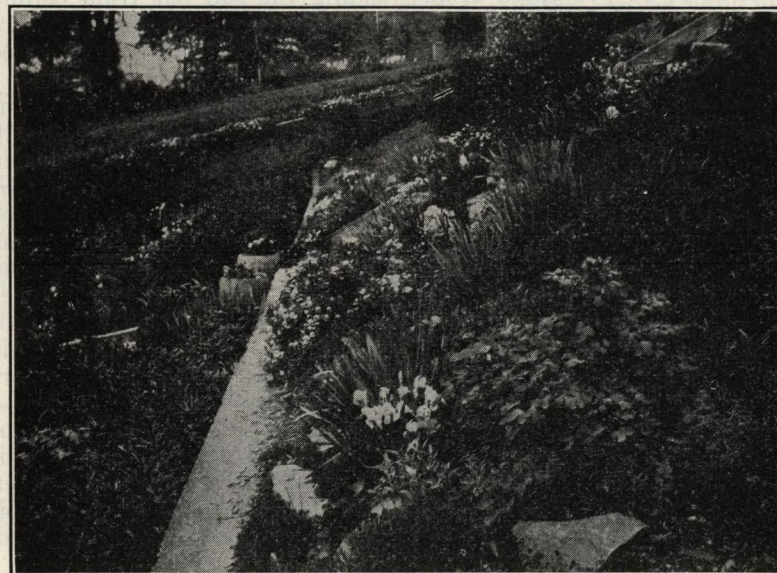


FIGURE 5.—A gentle slope held by a low wall at the base and made attractive by the frequent spacing of stones with gray weathered faces

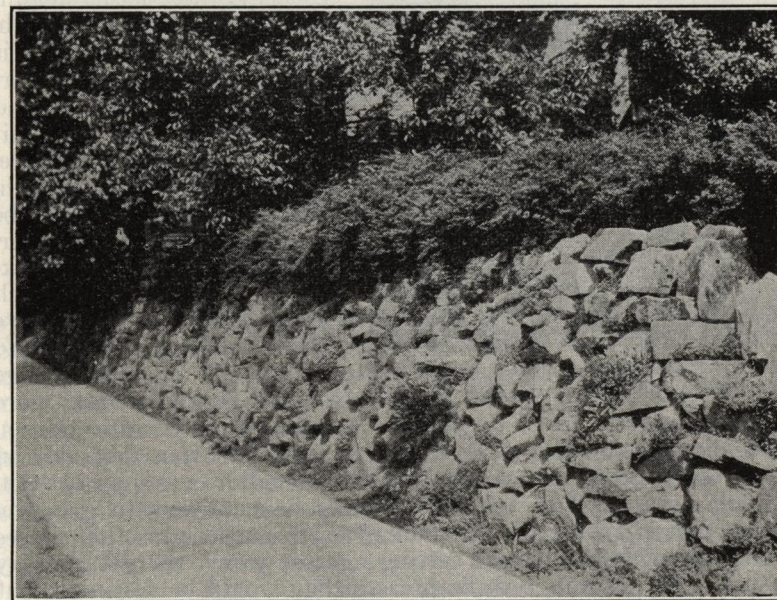


FIGURE 6.—A rock wall instead of a more sloping turf bank to hold a terrace in place

at other times it must be carried down over the wall itself, in which case it must be prevented from washing the soil out from behind the stones and injuring the wall. Sometimes a channel made of mortar is necessary; at other times the purpose can be accomplished by proper placing of the stones.

Soil suited to the plants to be grown must be placed back of the stones and in the spaces between them, when the wall is being built. In the northeastern part of the country, and especially in shady and moist situations, leaf mold and good friable soil usually are desirable. Often in open sunny places limestone chips may be better than soil, and sand and coal ashes are often desirable. A clear idea of what it is proposed to do should be in mind before the construction begins, so that proper soil may be provided while the work is in progress. It is often difficult to change the soil after the stones are placed.

Selection of Plants

Low-growing plants are of first importance for the rockery; their actual height, however, may vary much. Where a large quarry is developed into a rock garden, mountain laurel and other woody plants of similar height may have a place, while plants 2 feet high, such as columbines, may be too tall in a rock border. The character of the rockery and the scale on which it is developed both have their influence. Plants to be viewed at close range should be smaller and more dainty than those to be seen

from a distance. (Fig. 7.) Large plants are often desirable in forming the background against which the smaller ones may be seen. Large plants around a rock garden may be necessary to give the seclusion that is a desirable attribute of every garden; in other places they may provide the proper setting against which the details may be seen (fig. 8), although in both cases they would be distinctly out of place in the rockery itself.

Permanent plants are usually used, although annuals are often very useful in beginning the rock garden. Because rockeries are more likely to be naturalistic than formal, the plant material used is



FIGURE 7.—Small, dainty plants are required for rockeries designed to be seen at close range

generally expected to be of relatively permanent character, as, for example, herbaceous perennials and dwarf woody plants. Often the plants native to any section of the country can be used more appropriately than those that are introduced.

Two large groups of plants, the Sedums and the Sempervivums, provide many species suitable to be grown among rocks. Many of these will grow to the northern boundary of the United States, even on the Great Plains, while others succeed only where the winters are not extreme. Probably more species of Sedum than of Sempervivum will withstand extremely cold weather. Any species of these groups found in the catalogue of a near-by nursery firm will be reasonably safe for trial in the rockery. Some grow to a height of 18 inches to 2 feet, but most are from 4 to 6 inches high. The Sempervivums grow mostly in clusters or rosettes; the Sedums trail



FIGURE 8.—A rockery so near the kitchen and dining-room windows that small-scale planting was desirable. Note the tall border planting at the left of the garden and how an annual (sweet alyssum) is adding an interesting touch

over the rocks and especially along the crevices. The best-known Sempervivums are probably the various houseleeks such as the "hen and chickens." The well-known Sedums are the stonecrops, gold-moss, love-entangle, false houseleeks, and liveforevers. (Fig. 9.) Among other plants that are adapted to a wide range of country, including places subject to rather severe droughts, are the perennial Alyssums; some of the mouse-eared chickweeds, including snow-in-summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*); some of the early-flowering low-growing phloxes such as *Phlox amoena*, *P. divaricata*, and *P. subulata*, dwarf irises in variety; and many of the Aquilegias or columbines.

Some of the plants well suited to shaded situations in the northeastern United States and in the Puget Sound region are the forget-me-nots or *Myosotis*, bluebells or *Mertensia*, the polyanthus primroses, the dwarf saxifrages, the various columbines, the Campanulas

or bellflowers, ferns, and many of the native wild flowers, such as wakerobin, bishopscap or miterwort, alumroot, squirrelcorn, dutchmans-breeches, and many others.

Among the plants that may be especially suggested for sunny situations in the northeastern United States are many of the Campanulas or bellflowers, many species of Dianthus or pinks; *Anemone pulsatilla*, *Aubrietia deltoidea*, *Iberis sempervirens* or evergreen candytuft, lavender, the large-flowered *Physostegia*, the more dwarf Polemoniums, and the dwarf Veronics or speedwells.

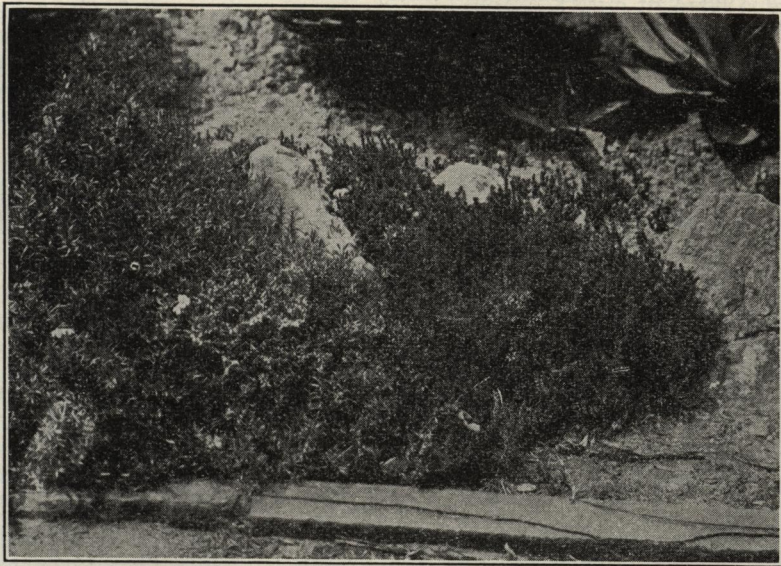


FIGURE 9.—Sedums are particularly adapted, because of their hardiness and beauty, for growing among rocks

In dry regions various cacti are principally depended on, supplemented especially by many of the Sedums and Sempervivums. A few cacti will stand much cold, though many are relatively tender. *Lippia canescens*, like the cacti, is suited to a warm dry place, but it will stand a temperature of 17° F. or slightly lower. The common periwinkle will stand a surprising amount of dry weather.

Herbaceous perennials are handled in rock gardens in the same way as in other gardens. Their care is discussed in Farmers' Bulletin 1381, Herbaceous Perennials. Some of the plants just mentioned are also discussed in that publication more fully than is possible here.