

**ORNAMENTAL  
PLANTING FOR PARKS  
AND PUBLIC GROUNDS**

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Ornamental Planting for Parks and Public Grounds by William S. Egerton

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**WILLIAM S. EGERTON**

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*G. A. Park*

[Read before the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, March 14, 1896.]

ORNAMENTAL PLANTING

FOR

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PARKS AND PUBLIC GROUNDS.

BY

WILLIAM S. EGERTON,  
SUPERINTENDENT OF PARKS, ALBANY, N.Y.



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## P R E F A C E .

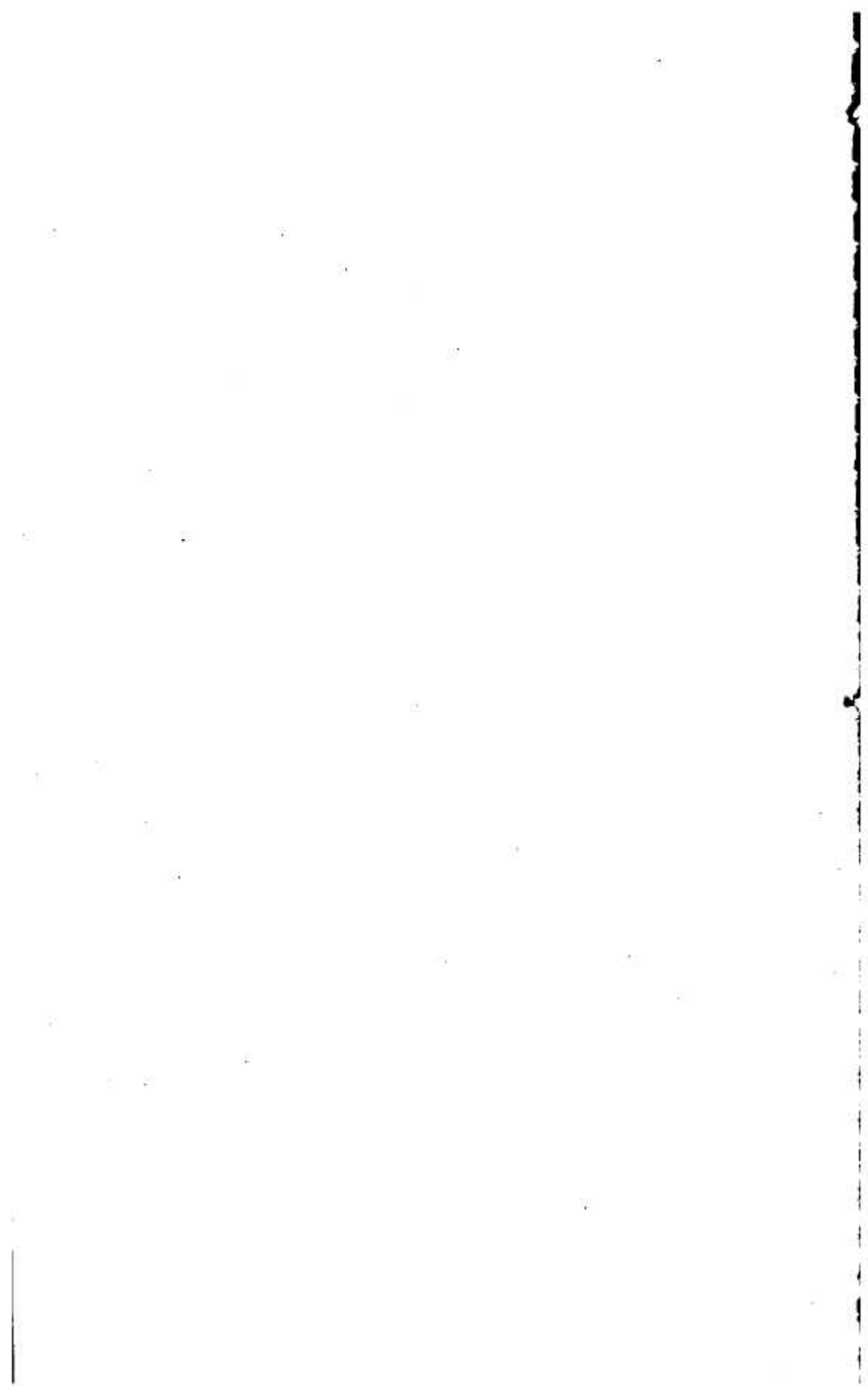
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In response to an invitation extended by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society to read a paper on "Ornamental Planting for Parks and Public Grounds," the following brief summary of the "Theory and practice of ornamental planting, as applied to suburban parks and city gardens or greens," has been prepared. It is impossible to cover so broad a field, in a brief paper; my aim has been simply to outline the scheme of work; to suggest the lines upon which natural, pleasing effects can be secured, without entering into an elaboration of detail and technicalities that would stretch this paper to unwonted limits, and possibly confuse my hearers.

A number of standard authorities have been drawn upon to facilitate the preparation of this paper, but the subject matter is largely the reflection of an extended experience in landscape gardening and the maintenance of public parks.

WM. S. EGERTON.







## Ornamental Planting for Parks and Public Grounds.

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The use in America of the word "park" as a general designation for gardens, green courts, and all sorts of public places, is an exaggeration of a French application of the word to the more private or kept grounds of a chateau connected with a forest.

Open spaces for public use in a city may be termed "places;" grounds in turf and trees within places "place parks;" and broad thoroughfares planted with trees and designed with special reference to recreation as well as for common street traffic, "parkways." A park, as defined by Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted, "Is a place for the enjoyment of rural scenery in a sense that a garden, for instance, is not. A town park is a place of escape to such scenery, from scenery of a town-like or artificial character. The circumstance that distinguishes a park, therefore, is that of seclusion. All parks, properly so called, are surrounded by screening plantations, and it is a leading motive in their design to shut out of view, to those to be benefited by them, whatever might be unfavorable to a continuous impression of consistent sylvan scenery." In a word, to shut off from those within the park a view of such features of a town-like character, that absolutely define the limits of a park and take away the deceptive and pleasing effect of its uncertain area.

The fundamental elements of any large park are not its roads, walks, bridges, buildings and other accessory features requisite for the public accommodation in the use of the



grounds. These may rather be classed as necessary evils. The essential element is the landscape, its surface undulations of hill and dale, or lawn; its trees, shrubs, single or in mass, in grove or copse; its deep woods or open glades, and its broad stretches of green sward or water. All of these elements in their endless combinations are constantly modified by the varying conditions of the point of view, the atmosphere, and the seasons. The true ideal of park recreation, to persons worn by the harrassing turmoil of city life, is the refreshing enjoyment of all that may be seen and felt amid the placid manifestations of nature embodied in the landscape.

There is nothing really different in the general theory of landscape gardening as applied to the ornamentation of parks from that of ordinary grounds. The apparent difference lies in the special application to some particular individual undertaking.

In actual practice one park must be treated differently from other parks, this difference of treatment being dictated by the situation, surroundings and topography. No general plan can be outlined that would suit the demands of every locality. The general idea and keynote, however, to most successful examples of park construction in this country (and there are no better examples abroad), is the simple and natural effects, or meadow-like stretches of lawn, circumscribed or bounded by ornamental plantations properly distributed and massed. The main repose and highest enjoyment of parks reside chiefly in these spots.

The sense of quiet repose ministered to by a large lawn surface is not satisfied by picturesque ground, however vigorously it may be planted, and as the need for quiet repose in this work-a-day world is more constant than the need for vigorous stimulus, a lack of pastoral, meadow-like stretches of lawn in a large public park will always be felt by the habitual visitor, to be a serious disadvantage.

As a general rule each element in the scenery should be simple, natural and unobtrusive, so that the passing observer is impressed with the manner in which views are successively opened before him, through the innumerable combinations into which the individually modest elements constantly rearrange themselves; views which often possess every quality of complete and impressive landscape compositions.

The aim should be to produce the park, rather than the more elaborate pleasure ground or garden style of scenery, not only for the reasons above indicated, but because a ground of this character can be consistently and suitably maintained at much less cost, because, also, it will allow the necessary conveniences for the enjoyment of it by large numbers of persons to be introduced in such a way as not to be unpleasantly conspicuous or disastrously incongruous; and because it favors such a distribution of those who visit it that few shall be seen at a time, and that the ground shall not be over-crowded.

"A landscape in order to be beautiful, must have all its parts stamped with a common idea, and contributing to a single sensation. If it gives the lie here to what is said yonder, it destroys itself, and the spectator is in the presence of nothing but a mass of senseless objects."

The north meadow in Central Park, New York, has an area of nineteen acres; this area is greatly exaggerated to the observer by the judicious arrangement of the planting, opening up long lines of sight, and broadening here and there into large expanses of turf. The sheen of the grass, the varied tints of the foliage, the low-lying hillocks crowned with large forest trees, the great boulders entirely exposed or only half submerged, the meadow beyond running back to seemingly unknown distances, all contribute to make the picture one of pastoral beauty. There is dignity, there is breadth, repose, restfulness, and yet a sense of isolation that is not absolute. It is genuine park scenery that the eye is

tempted to linger on and the foot to walk on, and presents, if reviewed as a single feature, one of the best examples of good park work.

The same general features have characterized the work of a master-hand, in the long meadow of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, and will be secured in Franklin Park, Boston, when ultimately completed, and time has matured the growths and mellowed the crudities of the site.

The landscape gardener must take into consideration all the impressive and natural elements of the locality, in the planting of any park of sufficient extent to have a distinctive landscape character. The general aim of his work will be to make a harmonious combination with the dominant characteristics which nature has already stamped upon the site. He will seek a fuller or richer development of the essential leading features, simply softening what is hard, clothing what is bare, filling out what is meagre, and enriching what is beautiful, all in harmony with the original type.

He will thus avoid all novel conceits, all conspicuous eccentricities, all incongruous intrusions, and be guided by his understanding of the laws of nature and his sympathy with them. It is a common practice to value the decorative work in planting, on any given site, in general proportion to the degree in which it is obviously artificial, new or peculiar. Thus clumps of trees and shrubs, or beds of flowers and foliage plants, are located in conspicuous places, without fitting relation to the natural conditions of the landscape.

What is needed, therefore, is popular education with respect to the beauty, adaptability and arrangement of the component parts of successful design in landscape and gardening work.

There are fully one thousand different species and varieties of ornamental trees and shrubs, besides great numbers of hardy flowering plants, all possessing distinct features of beauty, that will thrive in the greater part of the United States.