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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT
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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Tuesday, August 22, 1944

QUESTION BOX:

How plant now for post-war?
Does asparagus fit Victory Garden?

ANSWERS FROM:

Garden specialist of the U. S.
Department of Agriculture

Victory Gardeners, I believe you've been doing a bit of reminiscing. Maybe stirring the garden soil stirs memories, too. Brings pleasant thoughts of childhood days and the lovely things that grew in response to Mother's or Grandmother's unflinching care. These memories have raised a few questions in the minds of the modern V-G's.

Here is a question that several of you probably have been thinking about. This earnest Victory Gardener writes: "My remembrance of Grandmother's garden includes a row of misty green asparagus. I thought when a child that she grew it for summer bouquets on the fireplace but I realize now that its major use was as a vegetable. Would it be possible to grow asparagus in a city garden or does it require a lot of care?"

Garden specialists reply that asparagus may well have a place in your garden if you expect to continue to cultivate garden space. It is a very satisfactory addition to any garden, they say. If you take good care of an asparagus bed you may expect good returns from it for many years without replanting. Many commercial beds are replaced every twelve or fifteen years but with good fertilization and cultivation to keep the weeds down, a good bed may last as long as 20 years. You should not cut the shoots the first year, but certainly it would be worth waiting one year to be able to harvest twelve years from the one original planting. I really don't know of any better proposition in the gardening line. That is assuming that all Victory Gardeners take good care of their plantings, of course.

Most asparagus plantings are made in early spring but our garden club chairman says if you think you won't be able to get at it then, you can plant this fall. You may have difficulty finding a seedsman or grower with plants ready for fall but if you should, it would surely be better to put the plants in this fall than not get them in at all. If you prepare the soil well, plant carefully and mulch through the winter, the chances are good for satisfactory results. I quote my garden chairman,

Here is another gardener with memories. She says: "My family lived on a farm when I was growing up and since I have been Victory Gardening I keep remembering things about the garden we had there. It must have been a rather well established affair for it seems to me there was a part of it that always remained the same and was not disturbed when spring planting went on. I have a good sized suburban place and am wondering if I could put in some plants that would be more or less permanent!"

That is an excellent idea, say all the experienced gardeners on my list. Plants of this type are usually called perennials. If they are given proper care, they will go on producing year after year without replanting. That certainly is a virtue to be cherished these busy days when dozens of things need to be done at the same time. Put these perennials at one end of the garden where they will not be disturbed.

We've just been talking about asparagus. Another stand-by is rhubarb, or pie-plant, a general favorite with lots of uses. Rhubarb may be planted during the dormant season, my instruction book says. And that could be late in the fall or very early in the spring.

The soil can hardly be too rich for rhubarb and asparagus, says my garden guide. Both do best on deep, loamy, well-drained soils. Asparagus plants should be set about 16 inches apart in the row and rows should be 4 to 5 feet apart. My garden book says 50 feet of asparagus should provide an ample supply for the average family. If your family has a special appetite for asparagus, you will know what to do about that. Rhubarb may be set about 4 feet apart each way.

And are they greedy feeders. Rhubarb especially. My instructions say to dig

a sort of trench for a row, going down deep 12 to 16 inches. Then put in about 6 inches of well-rotted manure or composts mixed with some commercial fertilizer. For your asparagus, you'd better mix in some lime, too, for this plant doesn't like acid soil. Then put in 3 or 4 inches of good garden soil. Set the rhubarb root division on which is at least one good bud, in the trench with end tip 2 inches below the surface of the ground and press down the soil. Add mulching material in early winter,

Those two crops need to grow a year before being cut for use. To use them the first season would impoverish the roots and weak plants would result. But there is a useful vegetable you can put in early this fall that will be ready for use the first things next spring. That is the winter onion. "Multipliers" or "Egyptians" some folks call them. Or "top-set" onions because they bear the small bulbs or "sets" on the tip of the green shoots. All you need for this early spring salad plant is good soil preparation and good sets. Put them out soon now, as you would any other kind of onion. Let them stand through the winter, adding a mulch if weather is severe, and they will be ready for you, come early spring. Next year leave a few plants growing in the row as mother plants to supply your stock for the following year.

Thanks, V-G's for reminding us of perennials for vegetable gardens. I'll be looking forward to more questions and the new adventures in gardening lore you're always getting me into.

