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## The Conservation of Wild Flowers

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typewriter. The teacher should make the management of the department an instructive proposition for the student.

Now, at the close of the school year the apparatus should be cleaned, checked, and carefully stored ready for use next fall.

Harold E. Murphy.

### THE CONSERVATION OF WILD FLOWERS

On almost any warm spring day when the first woodland flowers have made their appearance, it is a very common sight to see parties of children, and many older people as well, scouring the woods in search of wild flowers. On Sundays, in the vicinity of larger towns the writer has seen areas practically stripped of every blossom. Very often before the parties have left the woods the flowers have wilted and are thrown aside. Many flowering plants and ferns are dug up, too often with an insufficient amount of earth, and are set out in gardens only to die for lack of the natural conditions necessary for their best growth. These people are no doubt well meaning but do not appreciate the results of their activities. On the part of children, their natural desire is to possess for themselves whatever of beauty appeals to them and we should not be too severe in our criticism, especially when they are merely imitating their elders. It is probably selfishness or thoughtlessness which prompts the older people. Only rarely, in this state, are plants removed for commercial purposes, but in the eastern states nurserymen advertise that they can furnish wild plants in carload lots. One reason sometimes given to justify the wholesale picking of wild flowers is "we love them so", although the speakers do not for this reason remove arms or legs of their human friends. People also say, "if I don't pick them some one else will" or "I didn't pick enough to do any harm." People who would not think of pulling off branches from their city neighbor's trees or digging up his flower beds do not hesitate, when on a drive in the country, to help themselves to the trees

or flowering plants in a farmer's woods. One of the most apparent results of the activities of these "nature lovers" is that many of our finest and rarest plants are disappearing from many localities where they formerly were common.

The nation is quite definitely committed to the principle of the conservation of our natural resources. The conservation of our forests is a definite policy of the government and of many private corporations, although there is still room for improvement. Protection of our songbirds is written into the laws of practically every state, and game animals are protected by both state and federal laws. The passenger pigeon passed out of the picture before sentiment for conservation became noticeable, although there maybe a question as to whether it is actually extinct. The bison narrowly missed extermination and is now found in a few protected natural areas as well as in public and private parks. The conservation of game animals has been strongly supported by sportsmen and the protection of songbirds has an economic basis in their value to agriculture. No one opposes the protection of these rare or valuable forms of wild life.

Wild flowers cannot be given protection on the same economic basis as is the case for game animals and birds. These plants do, however, have an importance, aside from their beauty, which often is not appreciated. As a part of the ground cover in the woods they aid in conserving moisture and preventing erosion. In uncultivated fields they serve to prevent erosion and by their death and decay enrich the soil. One reason for the slow progress of conservation of wild flowers is that the flowers are legally the property of the owner or leasee of the land and can be disposed of as he sees fit. On the other hand all birds and game animals are the property of the state and officers are provided for the enforcement of the laws. The usual theft or trespass laws would be sufficient if the owner would make complaint, which few will do. Wild flower laws are of little value because they contain no provision for enforcement. About

the only hope is a campaign of education in the schools in which the children will be instructed in the value of these plants and the need for their conservation.

One reason for the disappearance of many wild flowers is the destruction of their natural habitats which comes about through the cutting of forests, the breaking of prairie, and the draining of marshes or swamps. These are inevitable results of progress and the plants are simply victims of "civilization". The only remedy is to provide sanctuaries in natural areas where a few of these disappearing forms may be kept for future generations to enjoy. The wholesale picking of flowers interferes with the production of seeds which constitute the principal or perhaps the only method of reproduction. If the flowers are picked at all some should always be left to set seed. In the case of plants like the trillium or Jack-in-the-pulpit the flowers and leaves are so closely connected that the leaves are usually removed with the flowers and as a result the plants cannot manufacture food to be stored in the underground parts for the next season. Some plants, as the Dutchman's breeches, are seated so loosely in the leaf mold that pulling the flowers may destroy the connection between roots and soil which will cause the death of the plant. Most of the early spring flowers are naturally very short-lived and wilt readily when removed from the plant. The writer has seen great armloads of Virginia cowslip thrown away by the path before the pickers had even left the woods. Such plants are much more beautiful if left in their natural surroundings and can also be enjoyed by others. Many plants which are dug up for transplanting require special conditions for their successful growth. It may be that the soil reaction should be acid or that a certain association between fungus filaments and the roots is required. Often times the person is ignorant of the special conditions required or pays little attention to them with the result that the plants fail to survive transplanting. A point which still mystifies the writer is

why the picking or digging of plants in the woods or prairie, without the permission of the owner, is a smaller wrong than the taking of fruit, flowers, or vegetables from the farmer's orchard or garden. In this connection also can be mentioned the widespread, but none the less deplorable American habit of picnicing in the woods and then leaving papers, cans, and bottles strewn over the place to say nothing of open gates or broken down fences. At home the manners of these same people is probably above reproach. Their "out-door manners" are deplorable.

Following are given some suggestive lists for use in teaching the conservation of wild flowers. These are not intended to be complete and may be added to or modified for each locality as seems desirable.

I. Plants which should never be picked, at least where at all uncommon; adder's tongue, bird's-foot violet, bittersweet, bloodroot, columbine, Dutchman's-breeches, Indian pipe, Jack-in-the-pulpit, maiden-hair fern, all orchids, pasque flower, star-grass, trilliums, Virginia cowslip.

II. Plants which may be picked in moderation, if abundant; anemones (except rue anemone and wood anemone), bellworts, blue-eyed grass, buttercups, geranium, hawthorn, hepatica, phloxes (except cleft-phlox), spiderwort, spring beauty.

III. Plants which can usually be picked in abundance; asters, blazing star, blue violets (except bird's-foot violet), butter and eggs, golden-rods, grasses, primroses, roses, sparges, touch-me-not. A more complete list can be secured from the first address given below or from the writer upon receipt of a long envelope already addressed and bearing four cents postage. Literature, postcard pictures of wild flowers, and other materials may be obtained free or at small cost from the following organizations:

Wild Flower Preservation Society,  
3740 Oliver St., Washington, D. C.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1000  
Washington Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Ó. R. Clark.