

Samuel Untermyer in His Enchanted Gardens

GOVE HAMBIDGE

SAMUEL UNTERMYER, who is one of America's busiest and best-known lawyers, spends most of his spare time among flowers, shrubs and trees, creating enchanted gardens on the grounds of Greystone, his home in Westchester County, New York. During a stiff legal battle on which all of his energy is concentrated, he will retire to his estate and find peace in growing delphiniums and dahlias and orchids. "These three," he says, "are my favorite flowers."

His gardens are among the loveliest in America. And the best thing about them is that they are not merely a rich man's hobby. Many rich men have beautiful gardens, but few know much about them; the knowledge is vested in expert gardeners and landscape artists who are paid to do all the planning and the work. Mr. Untermyer not only knows the multitude of plants on his grounds by their common and in many cases their Latin names; he also knows their ways and their needs with the intimate knowledge a father has of his own youngsters.

He has, in other words, the same absorbing passion for growing flowers that a few men have for collecting fine antiques. In fact, there was a time, he said,



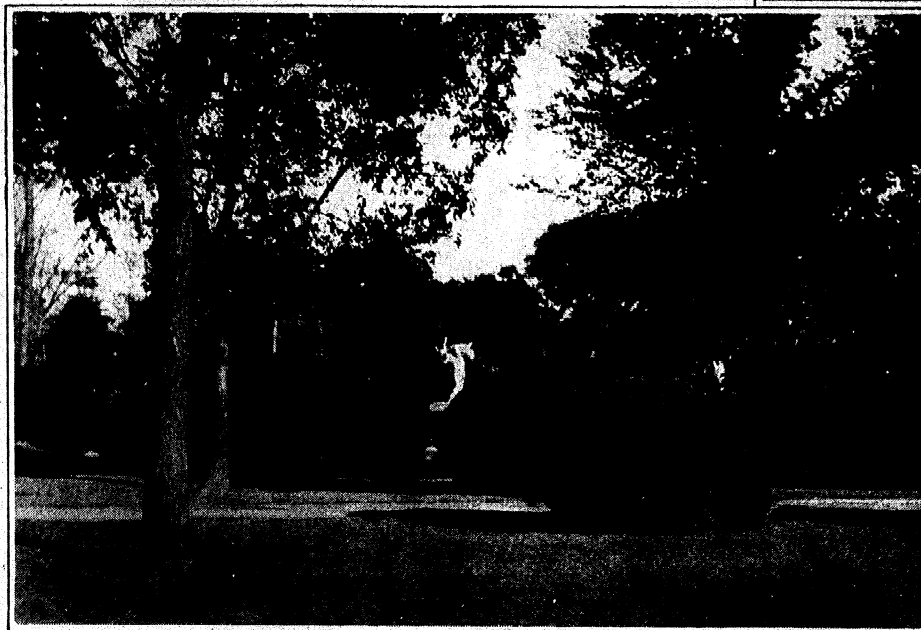
Samuel Untermyer is one wealthy man who really knows his garden

when he was a collector of paintings; but a long while ago his affections were transferred to plants, which also are objects of art, but living ones.

When I first talked with Mr. Untermyer, he was in the midst of some of the biggest work of his career—formulating a plan, as special counsel for the Transit Commission, for the reorganization and transfer of ownership of New York's huge subway system. The work necessarily involved sharp legal



The terrace steps of "The Vista"



Some of the fine boxwood in the Untermyer gardens

tussles, and the solving of vastly complex problems of finance and management. At the time, Mr. Untermyer's name not only was spread all over the front page of all the New York newspapers, but column after column on the inside pages was devoted to him and his transit plan—including what everybody of importance thought of him and it, complimentary or otherwise.

Yet I found him, on a

Saturday afternoon, sitting peacefully on the edge of a garden pool. In his buttonhole, characteristically, was a small fresh orchid, that symbol of the loveliness and insouciance of flowers which he wears every day of his life.

"Ah! I'm glad you are here. I'd like to ask your advice," was his greeting. "What would you think of a row of fine old boxwood planted along the sides of that path? Do you think it would be a mistake?" He was looking down a path that approached the house a path bordered by tall trees, on either side of which stretched emerald lawns.

I expressed an opinion. Then he showed me, already bought, the box he planned to use—six wonderful specimens perhaps a hundred years old, not yet unloaded from two big trucks in which they had just arrived.

Did he really want my advice? No; I believe he wanted an excuse to tell me about his new boxwood, very much as a youngster would make an excuse to talk to a visitor about a new electric train. New York's subways? They were for a time forgotten. It was a Saturday afternoon, and Samuel Untermyer was free to play the game he loves and he had six new boxwood trees to plant.

HE pointed out the rugged character of the surface of these boxwoods. That's the way he likes them. He would not for a moment allow the men to trim off the "bumps" in order to get the flat regularity admired by some people, he commented. Nor does he like the trees contorted into fantastic shapes. "A boxwood tree is like a man, more interesting if not too smooth. The pruning shears should yield to the contours of natural growth."

He has a good many specimens of box on the place, \$25,000 worth probably, with single specimens worth a thousand dollars apiece. They are dark and old and velvety in texture, remindful of old-time gardens—the gardens of George Washington at Mount Vernon, or Louis XVI at Versailles, or Pliny the Younger in ancient Tuscany, all of whom valued boxwood for its staid, characterful beauty.

The box at Greystone is the tight,



The dahlia garden with the Hudson river in the background

small-leaved English variety, Mr. Untermyer explained. It takes a hundred years or so to grow to respectable size—in the Dutch garden later I saw plants eight inches high that he told me had been there for fifteen years.

This new planting of boxwood is characteristic of the changes that are going on all the time on the Untermyer place. Not only is there the usual and expected replacement of plants that have failed or aged into decrepitude; there are also constant experiments and rearrangements. Mr. Untermyer takes a keen satisfaction in landscape gardening, and as he told me while we sat on the stone terrace at the rear of the house, he himself laid out the grounds and gardens, with the exception of the formal Greek garden.

THE place originally belonged to Samuel J. Tilden, and Mr. Untermyer bought it in 1889. At that time it comprised seventy acres, to which he has since added a hundred more. Now, of course, it is nothing like it was in Tilden's day. The shrubs, a great many of the trees,

the gardens, the roads and paths and pools and stone walls, Mr. Untermyer has planned and put in during the thirty-eight years he has lived there.

This gigantic landscaping task, never quite finished, is an unending outlet for his abundant creative energy. There is always something more to do, something that can be bettered. Indeed, one great advantage of the creating of gardens over other kinds of creative work is that you are never finished. When you do a painting or a piece of sculpture, it is done; you may enjoy it all your life, but work on it again you cannot. A garden, on the other hand, is a little world perennially in process of creation.

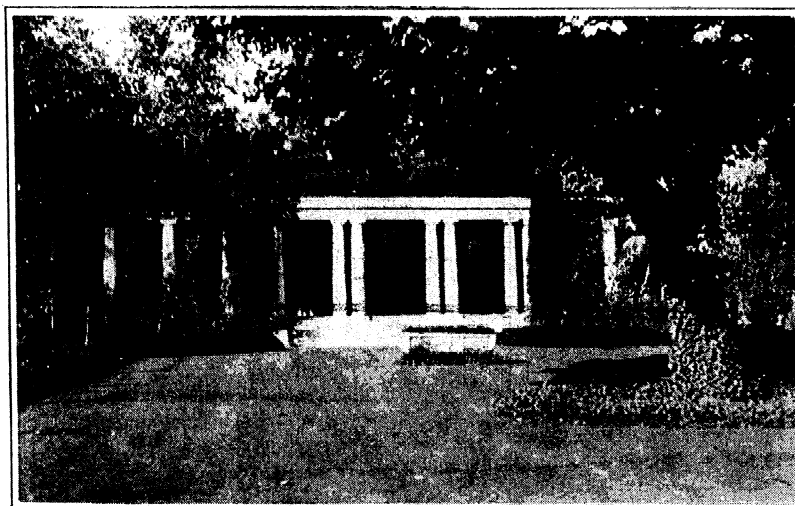
We left the house—the hallway of which is as filled with flowers as tho the garden had somehow marched straight in from the out-of-doors—to walk for a while over the grounds. These lie on hilly rock-strewn land on the edge of the city of Yonkers, with the Hudson below and the Palisades lifted up sharply on the New Jersey shore opposite.

"It is ungrateful soil, thin and stony," Mr. Untermyer remarked, "and I have had to make a good deal of it myself so that it would be more friendly and nutritious. I have blasted out rock, and in many places mixed large quantities of peat into the top soil—a thousand tons of it at least. This is especially necessary in the case of rhododendrons, which like an acid leaf-mold not completely decomposed.

WE also use about twelve hundred tons of straw-manure a year. We could not get along without it; you have to feed plants, like humans, plenty of nourishing food if you expect them to grow up healthy and vigorous."

These rhododendrons are among the chief glories of the place. There are thirty thousand of them, Mr. Untermyer told me, spread practically throughout the estate in groups and as border shrubbery, mostly under trees, since rhododendrons are grateful for shade. The best of them, he said, are the hybrids got in Europe.

Among the groups I saw magnificent plants twenty feet or more in height, and my imagination (Continued on page 128



This colonnade leads to "The Vista," at the left