

THE REASONS ARE AS DIFFERENT AS THE PEOPLE

By LEE McCABE

ACCORDING to a recent survey of Midwesterners, gardening in one form or another leads all other recreations with the somewhat staggering percentage of 97. This was 87 per cent greater than the figure for golf; 31 per cent more than fishing. To non-gardeners (obviously there are a few) this is little short of amazing. "What does anyone see in gardening?" they ask.

That's a fair question. In an attempt to find the answer, people in various fields were queried as to their reasons for gardening. Take novelist John Steinbeck, for example, who regularly putters around his city back yard in the East Seventies. "With me gardening is sort of a nervous tic," Mr. Steinbeck said. He was quite clear, however, about the fact that he "loves" his garden; is particularly proud of a forty-foot oak. "But we're just like everybody else in New York. We plant lots of bulbs and things and then, just when they're about to come up, we take off for the country." Mr. Steinbeck paused thoughtfully. "This year we may stay in town and see what happens." [When last heard from Mr. Steinbeck was boarding a plane for Mexico City.—Ed.]

Business Men, Too

Successful business men who also garden successfully are legion. Bank presidents, woolen manufacturers, mining engineers—even the president of the American Doughnut Corporation, Mr. Earl Morse by name. Among Mr. Morse's reasons for gardening are (1) "I like the challenge to exploit nature when she is generous and to outwit her in her unkind moods," and (2) "Gardeners never grow old. They are always full of enthusiasm and curiosity even at a great age."

Gardeners who also happen to be politicians (or is it vice versa?) are more rare. Senator George D. Aiken (R., Vt.) is one. The ex-Governor, well known in wildflower circles for his book "Pioneering with Wild Flowers," says

he gardens because "in the observance of plant characteristics and habits, it is possible to get a better philosophy of all life." Then there is State Senator Thomas Desmond (R., N. Y.). In addition to his senatorial duties, he maintains a forty-five-acre arboretum and a "relatively modest flower garden." Senator Desmond says he gardens because "it is a healthy change for my wife and myself and it brings us close to the beauties of nature * * * and a resulting most welcome peace of mind."

Mystery writer Rex Stout estimates that he spends 1,000 hours a year on his garden. (In winter he plays around with wax begonias, of which he has 150.) Why does Mr. Stout garden? "Well, when I was a kid in Kansas, my father and mother always wanted me to help them with the garden. Instead

I went off to the woods chasing rabbits. Guess I'm just making up for lost time now."

On the other hand, lots of people garden simply because they don't like a dreary-looking back yard. At least that's the reason given by one Washington newspaper woman.

There is even a faction, and a large one at that, which gardens simply to pass the time away—or so they say. Numbered among this group is a night watchman. "Time just flies," he said the other day, as he was making his nocturnal rounds.

Frustrated Farmers

Then there is the "frustrated farmers" group, which also has a surprisingly large membership. It was with some astonishment that we discovered, for example, that the worldly foreman of a print-

ing house gardened because his "one ambition in life was to be a farmer." It was interesting to note, too, that he—like so many other frustrated farmers—is city bred. "Only green thing I ever saw as a kid was green paint," he said. Still another member of this club, a photo-engraver, put it this way: "Reason I garden is because I don't have a farm." Obviously there is a big distinction between gardening and farming. "If I had a farm, I'd leave the flower growing to the wife."

It was quite apparent that this male contingent had all the other reasons for gardening (the thrill of seeing life come up out of the ground, etc.) but couldn't possibly come straight out and say anything that "corny." The exception to the rule was elevator operator Jessie Huge. "Why I just love

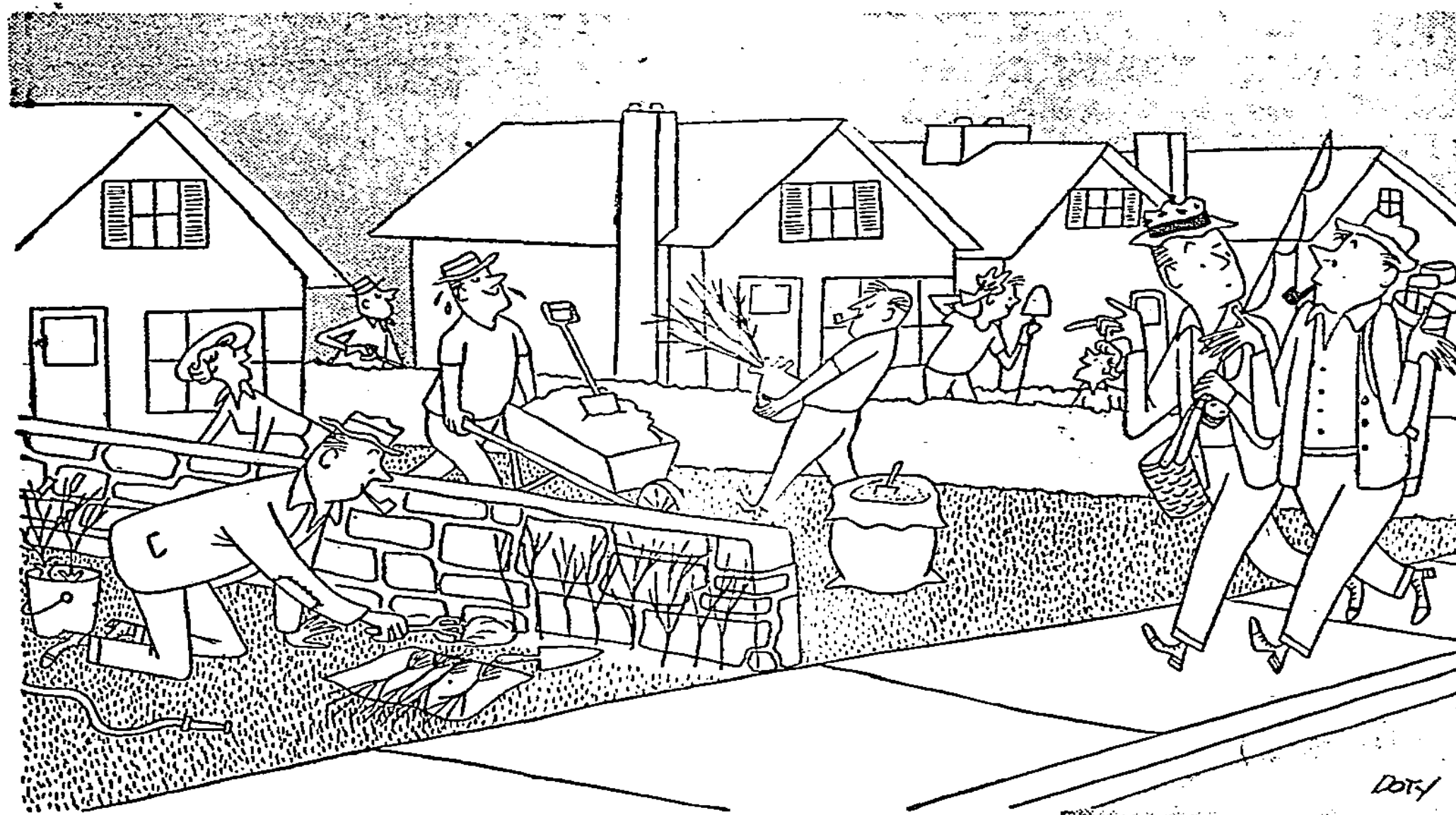
to garden," he said frankly. "I really do. You plant a seed and then you see a plant come up." He smiled. "It's a wonderful thing."

Psychology of It

Not entirely satisfied with these motives for gardening, we asked a psychiatrist on the staff of Roosevelt Hospital to shed some Adler-Jung light on the matter. (We were pretty sure what Freud would say.) "The old snowball theory is one basic reason why people garden," he began. "You move to the country and start gardening because everybody else is doing it. People also garden," he went on, "because it's free from interpersonal relationships, particularly clashes of will. In other words, the flowers aren't going to talk back. Then again," he continued, "people garden for esthetic reasons. Color, form and so on. This is not particularly psychiatric."

"Then there's the old mustard seed idea," he said, referring to the mysterious relationship between the man who sows a seed and the plant that comes up. "And take the fellow with a vegetable garden. When he's out working in it, it's a matter between him and the soil. For the moment he's independent not only of the man who sells vegetables but of his boss, too." He paused. "In fact, one could go on and on giving the reasons why people garden. Take me, for instance. My gardening, limited as it is, had its genesis in anti-gardening feelings—"

Hoping against hope that my own reasons for gardening were normal, I went on to find out what actress Helen Hayes had to say on the subject. "I've spent nine-tenths of my life in a job—a profession," Miss Hayes began. "And what I've achieved is a matter of opinion. In fact, there are always two opinions," she added. "Well, one day I was in the garden showing a friend of mine a rose. It was Peace, and I said, 'Now that's a perfect rose.—And dammit, there's no Brooks Atkinson to tell me it isn't in the morning!'"



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The New York Times

Published: March 8, 1953

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