PART THREE
The Histories
Within the Gardens
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For the community gardeners themselves, their gardens have many meanings: the pleasures and defeats of a season's gardening, the delight and value of the foods grown, and the year-round sociability and politics of the community garden of which their plot is a part. Yet, for the modern city as a whole these community gardens carry many meanings. They gather into the city traditions drawn from all over the world, thereby helping to sustain an invaluable quality of metropolitan life: the generative nature of cultural variety.

Gardens as Cultural Histories

Gardening traditions, like those of sports, crafts, art, music, literature, and religion, stand as intermediaries between the merely personal and the powerful blare of the dominant commercial and official cultures. They help us to find a shared path with like-minded citizens instead of condemning us to a lone journey amidst the clamorous crowds of uniformity. Gardens accomplish this service through the modest and commonplace expressions of ordinary people, without the necessity for large institutions, heavy subsidies, elaborate public relations campaigns, or expensive programs.

The force of cultural variety is exerted only within the domination of the host city itself. All cities function both as disciplinarians and as givers of new opportunities, and food preferences and food habits are not exempt from this treatment. After all, people come to the city seeking work, and here is offered a range of occupations from streetsweeper to radiologist that cannot be found in the countryside. Yet a pressure for conformity accompanies this list of opportunities. The city's rhythms are not to be denied. You must work when others work, and therefore you must eat when others eat. Also, because most newcomers to the city start with low wages they must buy what is easiest to come by and what is cheap. So, for example, the big breakfast of the rural South, meat, eggs, and cornbread, must be replaced with breakfast cereals and squishy white bread; hot dogs and hamburger become staple meats.¹

Although newcomers must follow the city's time clocks and adjust to its markets, they need not abandon the pleasures of their customs during leisure times. The community garden is thus an adjunct to the "down home" Sunday dinner, the party with the family and fellow countrymen, or the national festival or religious feast day. It is also an opportunity for those with country skills to exercise them and to feel the pleasure of mastery over the natural world which surrounds them.² A study of Kansas City showed that everyone in that city, newcomer and old resident alike, shared a core diet, but for treats, for special occasions, and for sport and pleasure, everyone also maintained his distinct tradition: some by gardening, some by fishing, some by hunting, and some by all three.³ The recent inflation in food prices has added a cash incentive to these leisure practices.
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Now urban gardeners can save several hundred dollars by working their community plots.¹

Gardening, even gardening in public on a community garden, is a liberal activity. You do not have to give up your culture to be a city gardener. There is no one right way to grow vegetables and flowers, because within the broad limits of urban climates all the world’s agricultural traditions will succeed. Whatever the local climate affords you may grow. Indeed, the concrete, bricks, asphalt, furnaces, and air conditioners of the city have a warming effect on local climates and thereby stretch out the vegetable season by a few weeks.

All newcomers start out by planting what they know from their own past. For example, southern gardeners try sweet potatoes and okra in Boston; the Chinese plant their hairy squash and bitter melons; the Puerto Ricans tend their cilantro, which is the same plant (Coriandrum sativum) as the Chinese yuen tsai and the Bible’s coriander.² Mediterranean Bostonians from Italy, Greece, and Lebanon carefully tend their tender grape vines (Vitis vinifera) which are a different species from the native Concord grape (Vitis labrusca). If you walk about Boston today examining the different community gardens closely, you will find, in one or another plot, almost all the food plants of the world, and most of the gardening techniques of the various peoples and various regions of the earth. Only, the cold winters of most North American cities forbid some tropical plants and tropical farming practices.

This gift to the city’s culture is part of an ongoing historical process in which people, plants, and methods of cultivation are in continual change. City dwellers learn from each other and quickly adopt each other’s ways: the Italian fondness for basil has recently become a general American fashion; corn appears in Chinese dishes; and the Chinese system of raised bed horticulture attracts American gardeners.³ Thus, each garden plot is both a continuation of a long history and a part of today’s ongoing cultural processes.

Within the gardens themselves history advances at several very different paces. One pace, the slowest, is the process of the domestication of wild plants. This is the slow sequence by which human beings adapted to plants and plants adapted to humans. The world vegetable list emerged from these thousands upon thousands of years. A second pace is the process of formation of the world’s regional diets, cuisines, and agricultures. For convenience this pace can be imagined as having a speed of recorded human history, say a pace of five thousand years. A third pace is the swiftly moving sequence of events of the modern world itself: the explosion of changes that set in after Columbus’s discovery of the New World. This recent history is the story of the migrations of millions of people from continent to continent, the opening up of vast new agricultural regions, and the urbanization of mankind. These three different sequences of change, each one with its unique cultural meanings, are brought together in even the smallest garden plot.
Consider, for a moment, the few rows of sweet corn that stand up in some city gardens during the late summer. The corn (*Zea mays*) is being grown as a delicacy. It is the sweet corn that flourishes in country and suburban gardens and is one of the delights of the American cuisine. In keeping with the fastest pace of change, the city dweller is growing corn because he is a part of a cultural chain of learning and teaching which stretches back to the late eighteenth century when the Indians of New York, the Six Nations, taught the English settlers how to eat corn as a green vegetable.

The Indian use of the plant invokes a slower-moving clock: theirs was the pace of the formation of diet, cuisine, and agricultural practices. The Indians of the two Americas developed one of the world's basic diets—the corn, bean, and squash diet. Archaeological remains show that this diet has been in place at least since 2,500 B.C. The corn of the Indians, however, was not one variety but many different kinds, each favored because of its different use.

In the long spine of mountains that stretches from the Andes through Mexico, Indians tended many varieties of sweet corn, corns with short cobs, round ends, irregular rows of kernels, and kernel colors that ranged from white to deep red. They used these sweet corns for roasting and boiling, for dried meal, for pounding into a powder to make sugar, for fermenting into an alcoholic drink, and for religious ceremonies. This wide range of human uses meant that the Indians encouraged the variation that naturally occurs in any species, and that they favored varieties and hybrids that were sugary. Such use and selection constitutes a very important stage in a plant's history. Human beings by encouraging the variations in a species thereby make it possible for the plant to flourish in many different settings, and they thereby prepare it for later migrations around the globe. Because of such a long historical process none of the cultivated vegetables today is fussy; they all can be grown in many different environments.

In this region of many varieties of corn, some sweet corn hybridized with some starchy corns (corns like today's field, or cattle, corns) to produce a long-eared, regular-row, yellow-kernel corn much like grandfather's prized Golden Bantam. This variety then migrated east from the Great Plains of North America to the Northeast. It was favored by the Indians of the Northeast because they did not use corn for sugar but only boiled, roasted, and dried it. This was the variety of corn, and the cluster of uses, which the Indians taught the Europeans. Yet the earlier and more various corns of Mexico and Central America still exist, and they provide the genetic pool out of which today's plant breeders dip for the "inventions" of next winter's seed catalogue.\(^7\)

Finally, behind the stages of the years of history and archaeology lies the long and unknown period of domestication itself. It seems likely that the first domestication of corn took place somewhere in the Andes. There men and women took the earliest steps toward the domestication of the wild ancestors of today's city garden corn. Perhaps they
merely picked the grass, or used its ears for some religious purposes. Because it was being picked the corn began to travel about, meet new circumstances; variations were encouraged. The early corn users must have favored some varieties over others, and in time they took up cultivating the plant.

This process of human and plant interaction went on for many centuries, indeed for so many centuries that the wild ancestors of modern vegetables have died out. Yet, startling though it seems in the face of modern plant science and food experimentation, no plant eaten by modern man was not eaten or used by prehistoric man! In prehistory all our vegetable species came into being. Humans have stopped eating many plants, but we have added no new species to our tables except the strawberry, an eighteenth-century hybrid. Today's big city vegetable garden is thus the carrier of a line of human experience which stretches continuously back to our hunting and gathering ancestors.

Thanks to the planting of community gardens on the vacant lots of the city, one of the urban pleasures of the United States is community-garden watching. A walk about most neighborhoods will turn up a great variety of vegetables, many distinct methods of cultivation, and gardeners who carry plant and gardening traditions from all across the nation and from all over the world. The history of the plants they grow is not readily available, but the cumulation of works in archaeology, botany, biology, anthropology, history, and geography makes it possible to assemble a brief sketch of most vegetables. The long processes of domestication, of course, cannot be known, but they can be summarized in the form of an estimate of the region of origin for a given plant. The second stage, the five thousand years of archaeological and historical time, is full of gaps, but some major events are recorded. Finally, the modern pace of world migrations of people and plants is well documented. In the case of the United States, the plants came pretty much on the timetables of the immigrants. So the English brought the cabbage, the Africans the mel- ons, and the string beans and pumpkins were here with the Indians to welcome them both.

To enhance the pleasure of urban community gardeners, and to encourage the informed garden watcher, we have listed the plants commonly grown in Boston's garden plots and arranged them according to the migrations of peoples: the Anglo-Irish garden and the Afro-American garden, which represent the early migrations from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries; the Italian garden and the Chinese garden, which represent late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migrations; and the Hispanic garden, which dates from the post-World War II immigration of Puerto Ricans to Boston. Other cities offer different histories and different vegetable lists: German, Norwegian, Japanese, Mexican, Vietnamese and so forth. But even the five Boston examples embrace the world from the Andes to the Himalayas, from Siberia to the African equator.
The Anglo-Irish Garden

Bostonians with backyards have been growing vegetables since the first settlement of
the city in 1630. Many of the descendants of the British and Irish migrations, however,
have been crowded into apartments or houses whose yards serve only as parking places
for automobiles. In recent years some of these citizens have joined their neighbors in
establishing community gardens, and on such occasions they have often planted the tra­
ditional vegetables of the standard American cuisine: peas, radishes, lettuce, beets, car­
rots, green beans, cucumbers, squash, onions, tomatoes, and cabbage.

Peas (Pisum sativum) are the first seeds planted in a Boston garden. A local saying
calls for planting them on St. Patrick’s Day, 17 March, even though the ground is cold
and often blanketed with a fresh snowfall. The pea is an extremely ancient vegetable;
indeed it is known only as a cultivated plant and has no wild forms. The plant is thought
to have had its origins in the Mediterranean and also in Afghanistan. Ancient small,
round, smooth peas, seeds much like some of our modern varieties but smaller, have been
excavated from Swiss lake dwellings of 3000 B.C., and others were dug from the site of
the ancient city of Troy. Peas were not found in Egyptian tombs, however, and they
migrated only slowly to China, reaching there during the seventh century A.D.

In Europe peas were grown for storing as dried seeds, and the “pease porridge” of the
nursery rhyme was a dish made from dried peas, much like pea soup or lentil soup today.
During the seventeenth century the Dutch taught the English and the French to cook
peas as a fresh vegetable, and there followed a wave of fashion for eating green peas. By
a similar quirk of fashion, one of the earliest English varieties of peas was a sugar pea
with an edible pod (P. sativum macrocarpon), which long passed out of favor but is now
enjoying a vogue as a pleasant imitation of the Chinese taste for cooked pea pods.

Very often radishes (Raphanus sativus) are planted at the same time as the peas in
Boston gardens. Indeed, the radish is the plant Americans use to teach their children
about gardening because it comes up so quickly and can so soon be eaten. Radishes,
however, are not a toy vegetable but very important members of Mediterranean, Near
Eastern, and Oriental cuisines.

The domesticated radish has a wild relative (R. raphanistrum), which flourishes as a
weed in all the world’s Mediterranean climates, including California. It seems likely that
the plant domesticated itself by finding a comfortable spot as a weed among the settle­
ments of mankind. Whatever the long domestication process, at the dawn of history the
Egyptians were eating radishes in quantity. The Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–420
B.C.) mentions them as a food of pyramid builders (History, 2:125). The British did not
make much use of radishes in their diet, but the plant was an important ingredient in
Anglo-Saxon medicine, being prescribed for headaches, shingles, pain, depression, and madness.

Lettuces (*Lactuca sativa*) are very ancient vegetables whose origin is unknown. The milky stems and the leaves have both long been prescribed as medicines. The Greeks and the Romans used lettuce to settle the stomach and to induce sleep at the end of dinner. On other occasions they offered lettuce with radishes at the start of the meal to arouse guests' appetites. The Egyptians grew some form of lettuce, and the biblical Jews ate a lettuce as one of the bitter herbs to accompany the Pascal lamb (Exodus 12:9). This herb, however, may have been chicory, a lettuce relative that grows wild all over Europe, Mediterranean Africa, and the Near East.

There are three basic types of lettuce, the crispy-leaved, the round-headed, and the cylindrical-headed. The last is known as the romaine, or Cos, variety. It gets its name through a corruption of the word “Roman,” and Cos is a variation of the spelling of the Greek island of Kos. This type came late to Britain and to New England, being introduced to England only in the reign of Charles I (1625–49). Lettuces, however, were brought to the Americas by Columbus on his second voyage of 1493–96. They spread rapidly through the early settlements so that a century later lettuce was being eaten for salads in Brazil, Mexico, and Quebec.¹⁰

It seems most likely that beets (*Beta vulgaris*) were first taken up by man for their green leaves and only later cultivated for their roots. The practice of extracting sugar from beets was an eighteenth-century invention. The modern vegetable probably descended from a highly variable species of wild beet (*B. maritima*) which grows on the seacoasts of Europe and Asia. Such plants are called sea-kale beets in Ireland, and their leaves are fed as a cure to sickly sheep. Another possible parent of the garden beet is the wild *Beta petula* of Portugal and the Canary Islands. These European beets have long yellow roots, and yellow beets are still grown in Europe. The red beet is an Italian variety which was perfected in France during the early nineteenth century.

Wild carrots (*Daucus carota*) thrive in the sandy vacant lots of American cities and flourish in the old fields and abandoned farm lands of North America. The tall plant sports an umbrella of white flowers which lends the plant its common name: Queen Anne's lace. It apparently came to the New World with the first settlers from Europe.¹¹ Just how the cultivated varieties of carrot (also *D. carota*) are related to the ubiquitous wild flower has yet to be determined.

The greatest diversity of carrots occurs in Afghanistan, and so this region is thought to be the vegetable's most likely place of origin. The Greeks and the Romans did not make much of carrots in their cuisine, probably because in the heat of the Mediterranean climate the plants form bitter roots. Carrots were, however, imported from Gaul
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(France), and the Arabs grew them in Spain. The Chinese seem also to have been slow to incorporate the carrot into their diet, the earliest mention of the vegetable there being the thirteenth century A.D. The Dutch are the developers of the modern garden varieties. They made a specialty of carrots and introduced their selections into England.

The green bush and pole beans of Boston gardens (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) are descendants of plants that were widely cultivated by prehistoric Indians. Like many vegetables long associated with human beings, the common bean has an extraordinary variability, with over five hundred varieties bearing separate names. The pea bean and navy bean, the beans of Boston's famous baked beans, are two such.

The American Indian's beans were not the beans of the English or Europeans. Europeans grew quite a different plant, the broad bean, or fava (*Vicia faba*), which was an ancient plant of North Africa or Persia. The English called the American vegetable "French beans" because of their route to England: Samuel de Champlain (1567–1635) had brought seeds of American beans to France from his Canadian and New England explorations. They soon proved popular in France; hence the British thought of them as a French invention.

The cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*) is another biblical plant, having been fed by the pharaohs of Egypt to the slaves who built the pyramids. "Think of the fish we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic!" the Jews cried during their flight from Egypt when they tired of eating manna (Numbers, 11:5–6). Cucumbers slaked the workers' thirst and filled them up. The vegetable was immensely popular with all classes from princes to slaves. India seems to have been the original home of the cucumber; from there it traveled west to pharaonic Egypt and east to China, mention being made of the vine in China during the second century A.D.

Columbus planted cucumber seeds, and by 1494 the vines were growing nicely on an island in the Caribbean, Santo Domingo (Columbus's "Hispaniola"). Indians spread the seed throughout the New World, so that when Hernando de Soto invaded Florida in 1539 he was surprised to find the plants already growing prolifically there. In 1535, far to the north, Jacques Cartier recognized cucumbers when he visited Indian villages along the St. Lawrence River. 12

When they plant their summer squashes (*Cucurbita pepo*), Boston gardeners continue the ancient Indian diet of squash, beans, and corn. Indeed, "squash" is an Algonquin word which has entered the English language. The Indians' name was *askoot asquash* meaning "something eaten green." Seeds of squashes have been unearthed in Mexico which date as far back as 5500 B.C. Like all such long associates of man, these vegetables appear in a tremendous range of varieties. The old warty garden crookneck squash (*C. moschata*) is the close relative of the pumpkin (*C. pepo*), while the small, smooth yellow summer
squash and the prolific Italian zucchini are both variations on the pumpkin itself. All these squashes are American plants, although authorities are still in doubt about the starting place of the great Hubbard and turban squashes (C. maxima).

The onion (Allium cepa) is another of the biblical plants. A member of the lily family, it was often pictured in Egyptian tomb paintings. In their homesickness for the foods of Egypt (Numbers 11:5) the Jews recalled the major forms of the vegetable: “leeks [A. porrum], onions [A. cepa], and garlic [A. sativum].” The plant itself is thought to have had its origins in Central Asia and thence to have spread by migrations across the globe, where in different regions users have encouraged its variations as chives, shallots, green bunching onions, and most recently the tiny cocktail onion.

Tomatoes, perhaps today the quintessential vegetable garden plant (Lycopersicon esculentum), were natives of the Andes, where they still grow wild. Mexico has been established as the likely site of domestication. There one Indian language (Nahuatl) names the plant tomatl, and well before the Conquest tomatoes had become basic ingredients in the Mexican diet. After the capture of Mexico City in 1519, the seeds traveled east to Europe, where for centuries the plant remained a minor garden curiosity and medicine, except in Italy. The tomato is a relative of the nightshade family (Solanaceae), whose members include the poisonous belladonna and the mandrake. Like them, the tomato contains a mildly toxic alkaloid in its leaves and in its green fruit, but it breaks down as the fruit ripens and turns red.

Thomas Jefferson planted tomatoes and made notes about various ways of cooking them. In 1820 one Robert Gibbon Johnson created a small scandal by publicly eating a tomato on the courthouse steps at Salem, New Jersey; yet despite Johnson’s bold demonstration the plant’s poisonous reputation persisted even into the twentieth century. In the late nineteenth century canned tomatoes, chili sauce, and ketchup began to capture American tastes, but the tomato did not become a major vegetable here until the 1920s. It is not a fruit with many nutritional gifts, but now Americans eat it in such quantities that the tomato has become a major element in our diet. Its color, its flavor—at least in its homegrown state—and its versatility in cooking account for its recent triumph.

The last harvest of the fall is the cabbage (Brassica oleracea), a plant of the seacoasts of Europe that was probably first cultivated for its seeds in order to make them into oil. In India today the local species of Brassicas, mustards, are grown for their oil seeds and for cattle fodder, and it is the offspring of such plants that flourish across the world as the persistent mustard weeds of farm fields and gardens. Because there are a number of cabbages, turnips, and mustards that grow wild in Europe, they provided the genetic stock for the many modern varieties of cabbage vegetables. The tightly headed common cabbage (B. oleracea) was known in Roman times, and its head size has been enlarged since then by selection.
Among other garden cabbages broccoli (*B. oleracea italica*) was an invention of the Italians, and kohlrabi (*B. oleracea gonglyodes*) came out of Hungary and Austria during the sixteenth century. Turnips (*B. rapa*) were the filling vegetable of northern Europe until the American white potato displaced them during the nineteenth century. The American name for turnip, rutabaga, recalls this northern history: the Swedish name for turnip is *rotabagge*. The Brussels sprout (*B. oleracea gemmifera*) has its obscure origins in the Middle Ages. No one knows how the English came to give the plant its Belgian name. The cauliflower (*B. oleracea botrytis cauliflora*) may have been known to the Romans, but it definitely was cultivated by the Arabs in Spain during the twelfth century. Italian merchants imported it from Lebanon and Syria during the sixteenth century. Then the Dutch took it up, and in Queen Elizabeth's time (1558–1603) it was a culinary fad in England. The first American importers, however, were the Spanish, who introduced it to Haiti, where it was reported flourishing already by 1565.

In sum, what makes the Boston Anglo-Irish garden a typical American garden is its diversity. Its vegetables carry the history of many regions and cultures; their ancestors came from Asia Minor, the Mediterranean, and Latin America. All species had achieved their modern varietal forms by the time of Columbus's discovery of the New World. With the exception of the tomato, all the vegetables appeared early in the first European settlers' gardens. Peas, radishes, lettuce, beets, carrots, green beans, cucumbers, squash, onions, and cabbage were grown in the Pilgrim gardens of Plymouth Colony.  

Today Boston urban gardeners employ methods of cultivation that reveal northern patterns of land use and northern climatic expectations. Plants are grown in orderly rows on a level garden with the weeds chopped down in the paths and the vegetables watered from a hose or sprinkler, not irrigated by channels of water. Only the vines, the tomatoes and the beans, are tied up; the rest make their way "on the flat." As a gardening technique these methods resemble the improved northern European and New England farm practices of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modified only by the substitution of row cultivation for the more frequent use of hills, which was common a hundred years ago.

The Afro-American Garden

Boston's Afro-American gardens gather up three different traditions. They are first of all Boston gardens. Accordingly, they are as full of lettuce, tomatoes, green beans, onions, and summer squash as any in the city. Second, they are gardens whose plantings recall the southern origins of the gardeners' families. The selection of plants reflects the major elements of the diet of the American South. It was the Afro-Americans, after all, who were the cooks in the Confederacy, and it was they who brought African plants and Af-
rican ways of cooking to the region. The third element is the continuation of the seventeenth-century southern selection of Indian and English plants: the three staples, corn, beans, and squash, were the center of the Indian diet, while the collards came from England.

The sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) is often planted in Boston gardens. We call it by the mistaken name of “yam” because our American usage descends from Africa. Both the tuber we call sweet potato and the tuber we call yam are genetically defined as sweet potatoes. It is, in fact, a South American plant. This potato had been domesticated by Indians as early as 2500 B.C. and had been carried by Polynesians to New Zealand before the Conquest. The Spanish and Portuguese spread the plant across Asia and Africa. One of the true yams, a yellow one (*Dioscorea cayenensis*), was, and still is, a native staple of West Africa. It lent its Senegalese name to the American sweet potato, “yam.”

Boston gardeners who raise peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*) often follow the southern style of preparation: they boil the nuts instead of roasting them. Despite its presence in a northern city, and its ubiquity in the South, the worldwide spread of the peanut is startling.

It was long believed that the peanut was an African or Asian native, introduced into the New World by Portuguese settlers in Brazil. For example, a botanist reviewing the evidence of the abundance of peanuts in Indo-China and equatorial Africa reasoned that the plant originated in south China and then traveled westward. Its popularity in Asia and Africa fooled him.

All the known species of the genus *Arachis* are natives of tropical America. Peanuts have been found as decorative motifs on ancient Peruvian pottery, and the nuts have been dug from prehistoric graves. There is no question that somehow the plant traveled in pre-Columbian times either to China or to Africa, or both. Interestingly enough, the Harvard botanist Oakes Ames, when seeking to establish this history, analyzed peanuts he found in 1917 in Boston’s Chinatown and found them to be the same as American peanuts.

A popular South American plant which often appears in Afro-American gardens is the lima bean (*Phaseolus lunatus*). Archaeologists digging in Peru have discovered lima beans that date back to 5000 and 7000 B.C. The Spanish shipped these beans to the Philippines and slave traders brought them to Africa. Limas are now a very important food crop in both Burma and tropical Africa.

Curiously enough, the sixty-odd species that make up the bean genus *Phaseolus* have two distinct continental origins: South America or China, and India. Beans from each area were domesticated and developed entirely separate from one another. The American bean group, the kidney, string, lima, and pea beans, are comparatively large, grow in flattened pods, and often have seeds of many colors and markings. By contrast, the Oriental beans, like the mung bean (*P. aureus*), known to us all as the bean-sprout bean, grow in slender round pods, and are small and comparatively uniform in color.
Best known and most popular of all the African plants that appear in American gardens are the melons (*Cucumis melo*). The African muskmelons, cantaloupes, and casabas are universally popular. Mention of a “melon patch” even appears in the Bible (Isaiah 1:8). Most of the melons are African plants, but there are a number of species from India and a great range of variation among the Indian melons. In the Orient the elongated types of melons are grown as vegetables, and today, both in Africa and in the Orient, they are cooked, rather than eaten raw for dessert like the melons of American gardens.

The watermelon (*Citrullus vulgaris*) has produced a head-on conflict among botanical authorities. Both sides agree that the wild plant that grows in the savannas of Africa is small, bitter, and not good eating. From linguistic evidence Andrew Watson reasons that, like the cucumber, the sweet watermelon was the product of African and Indian exchange. He argues that the melon was domesticated in India and then carried by the Muslims back to Africa, where it has since thrived. He quotes a thirteenth-century author who wrote that the watermelons of the city of Aswan on the Nile River were growing so large that it required a stout camel to transport two of them. Oakes Ames, on the other hand, says that the pharaonic Egyptians were cultivating modern watermelons. For evidence he cites the presence of a melon leaf found in a mummy case. Watson did not refer to the discovery of this leaf, or perhaps he thought it was not the leaf of a sweet watermelon.18

However it came to be, the watermelon flourished, and still flourishes, in Africa, and it was carried to America with the slave trade.

Another African migrant in American vegetable gardens is okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*). In warm climates like the southern states, it grows to be a tall plant, four to six feet high. Its pods can be eaten raw or cooked. In the American South, and in Mediterranean cookery, okra is used to thicken soups and stews. The name “okra” descended from the Ghana Tshi language. The other common name, “gumbo,” began in Angola as “ki-ngomo,” then became the Portuguese word “quin-gumbo,” and finally in the West Indies was shortened to just “gumbo.”

The collards, or greens, of the Afro-American garden are European plants (*Brassica oleracea*). The very name collard is a corruption of an old English word for cabbage, “colewort.” The collards are non-heading cabbages which were brought by the English colonists to Virginia, where they became the major southern green because, unlike the head cabbage, they stand the heat well. Another name for collards is the Scottish word “kale.”

Two other southern greens, also members of the genus *Brassica*, appear in Boston gardens. One is a white mustard (*B. napus*), the other is the turnip (*B. rapa*). Because the turnip, like the carrot, is a biennial, it can be left in the ground over the winter and in spring will send up a fresh top which can be cut as “spring greens.”

Finally, a number of West Indians who have settled in Boston have set out asparagus
beds (*Asparagus officinalis*) as well as the usual Afro-American vegetables. Several species of asparagus grow wild in the Mediterranean, and the Greeks may have used one or more of these plants as medicines. Our name for the plant is much like the Greeks' *asparagus*. The Romans definitely ate both cultivated and wild asparagus, and from Rome cultivation spread to Muslim Spain, Syria, and Egypt. These cultivated plants reentered Europe in the fifteenth century and reached the New World in the seventeenth.

The methods used in Boston's Afro-American community gardens reflect both their American and southern origins. Like New Englanders, the Afro-Americans garden on the flat, only staking up the pole beans and the tomatoes. Many do, however, hill up their rows, cultivating about the roots of the plants and making a deep furrow between the lines of the vegetables. In the heavy clay soils of the southern states, this technique encourages deep rooting and breaks up the baked top ground. It also makes a channel for irrigation. Nevertheless, Boston community garden plots cannot be conveniently arranged for irrigation; watering is by can, hose, and sprinkler.  

### The Italian Garden

The Italians have brought long-standing and highly skilled traditions of intensive gardening to the United States. In common with the Chinese, though not to the same degree, Italians stake up plants and have vertical as well as horizontal gardens. Like the Chinese, too, Italian-Americans are extremely attentive, watering, weeding, cultivating, and trimming up their plants in daily visits.

Italy, as a Mediterranean country, sits in the midst of one of the five world centers of plant diversity, the others being Persia, India and the Malay Peninsula, the mountains of central China, and the spine of mountains from Mexico to Peru. Consequently, many modern garden vegetables are either Italian variants, like broccoli, zucchini, red beets, and Savoy cabbage, or are ancient residents in Italian gardens, like peas, radishes, and lettuce.

Although Italy, and especially southern Italy, suffered, and continues to suffer, the terrible problems of a landless rural population, neither the national government nor the municipalities have devised an allotment program for those without private holdings. As in the United States, some industrialists in northern Italy furnished gardens with housing they erected for their workers. Also, in 1928 and 1929 the Fascists set up a leisure time program, *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, to give seeds, plants, and prizes to gardeners, but they did not go on to make land available to local associations of gardeners, as was then the practice in France, Germany, and other northern European countries.

In recent years apartment dwellers in Italian cities have sometimes organized themselves to occupy vacant public land and to transform fringe city wastes into squatter
gardens. In one case in Turin, on two successive nights in April 1975, six hundred “urban farmers” seized such a parcel, divided the land among themselves, laid out pathways and fences, set up garden sheds, and began cultivation. Yet municipal authorities in Italy still lack a uniform response to such popular demands for garden space. Turin agreed to negotiations and subsequently leased the gardens to the squatters. Other cities have experimented with formal allotments, but still others have forcibly cleared off the gardens and their gardeners.\(^22\)

In Boston the Italians grow onions, peppers, beans, beets, lettuce, and zucchini in common with most gardeners. One of the special tests of the Italian-American vegetable garden, however, is the tomato \((Lycopersicon esculentum)\), which is very carefully tended. The Italians were the first, and for several centuries the only, Europeans to take the American tomato into their national cuisine. Within thirty-five years of the Spanish capture of Mexico City (1519), an Italian herbalist, Pier Mattioli, published an account of the new vegetable’s use. He wrote that the tomato was eaten fresh “with oil, salt, and pepper,” just as we eat it today.

The early Italian names for the plant, \(mala peruviana\) (Peru apple), \(pomi d’oro\), \(mala aura\) (golden apple), and \(poma amoris\) (love apple) followed the plant through Europe, but despite such encouraging names northern Europeans and their North American relatives refused the new delicacy. A 1581 statement by a French herbalist recorded the northern prejudice: “These apples were eaten by some Italians,” he wrote, “like melons, but the strong stinking smell gives one sufficient notice how unhealthful and evil they are to eat.”\(^23\) Undeterred by such nonsense, the Italians cultivated the plant and improved it for their own purposes. Since southern peasants boiled it down to make a thick paste, and dried it in the sun, they favored thick skins and meaty, dry, smooth-fleshed fruits. The plum and other varieties they developed are now being used by tomato breeders to make the indestructible and tasteless American supermarket tomato.

Eggplants \((Solanum melongena)\) are another must in an Italian garden. Their large purple fruits and shiny skins make them perhaps the most beautiful of all vegetables. A relative of the tomato, the potato, and the deadly nightshade, eggplant was long thought poisonous by Europeans, who only learned to cook and eat it from the example of the Muslims. One medieval Islamic cookbook offered eighteen different recipes.

The plant was first domesticated in India, where there are now several related species which still exist as wild plants or which flourish as weeds. They vary in shape and color, and only a few varieties are cultivated in Europe and the United States. The eggplant first traveled east to China, where a round-shaped variety was recorded in the sixth century A.D. The Chinese later developed a white variety of their own. The Muslims carried the vegetable west. A visitor to Samarkand, a city in south Russia on the medieval trade route for silk between China and Europe, noted six varieties of eggplant in
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the thirteenth century. By the end of the fifteenth Europeans had learned to cook and eat it, and subsequently it became a full-fledged member of Mediterranean cuisines.

The Spanish and Portuguese carried the eggplant to the New World, where it received some new names. In the West Indies it is sometimes called a garden egg. But the long migration of the plant from India found its historical echo when nineteenth-century Indian laborers were imported to the Caribbean and gave the eggplant the name “brown-jolly,” a corruption of the Bengali word brinjal.24

In addition to the common lettuces Italian-Americans plant scarola (Cichorium endiva), the crinkly-leafed salad, otherwise called curly endive. Its origin is uncertain. Some think it came from China and South Asia, in which case, like the eggplant, it moved west along the trade routes from India. The Greeks and the Romans cultivated it, but it disappeared from the records, and perhaps from cultivation, until the twelfth century. A related plant (C. intybus), wild chicory, also called blue succory, a plant with a flower like a blue dandelion, grows wild in Europe. During the nineteenth century these wild plants were cultivated for their roots, which were dried and ground as a coffee substitute.

Sicilian beet is Swiss chard, a white-rooted beet (Beta vulgaris cicla) grown for its leaves and used in soups and as greens. Americans call it by its French name, chard, but it is also known as seakale beet, and perpetual spinach. The last name describes its good-natured willingness to send up fresh leaves all summer long.

Chard’s origin is probably the Mediterranean region. The ancient Greeks knew the vegetable but regarded it, and cabbage, as indigestible unless highly seasoned; they therefore referred to both as food for the poor. In the Middle Ages, however, chard became extremely popular as the standard green to put into soups.

Garlic (Allium sativum), one of the many types of onions, is essential to both the Italian and the Chinese cuisines, and it is an ancient cultivar in both regions. In the Mediterranean it appears with the earliest historical evidence. The Egyptian priests thought it was food for slaves and poor people, but the Greeks enjoyed it. Indeed, the famous physician Hippocrates liked it better than onions. The oil in the garlic which gives it its pungency contains sulfur, and from that substance come the plant’s mildly antiseptic properties and its common use in old-fashioned medicine.

The Latin name for the whole genus of onions is the Roman name for garlic, allium. The Romans gave garlic to their slaves to make them strong, and issued garlic to their soldiers to make them courageous. It may be, however, that the garlic they ate was not the common garlic of today’s gardens but A. ampeloprasum, a larger and milder species.

Most urban gardeners do not grow white potatoes (Solanum tuberosum) because good ones can be purchased cheaply in the market, but where garden plots are large they are sometimes grown for the luxury of fresh new potatoes during the summer and fall. In the big community garden in East Boston, Italian-American residents do set out potatoes,
and it is fitting that they do so, since the Italians were among the first Europeans to appreciate this American plant.

There are dozens of species and varieties of potato, and a full range of colors from red and violet to yellow and white, which grow in the spine of mountains that runs from Mexico to Chile. Part of this congregation of plants is so long-descended as to be pre-human. The process of domestication, therefore, must have been accidental as well as conscious. Some of the modern species seem to have come as weeds in gardens and trash heaps, others by hybridization. Whatever the paths to human cultivation, potatoes were staple foods in the Andes for two thousand years before the Conquest, and there are potato-design pots that date from 800 A.D.

The Spanish brought the white potato to Europe in the 1530s, and it was noted as present in Italy by the 1550s. The ways the plant became an English and American colonial vegetable are not known. It is possible that some captain who seized a Spanish ship brought the plants to England, and there is a story that Sir Walter Raleigh’s gardener grew some for him on his estate in Cork, Ireland. It was Ireland, after all, that first made the potato its staple. It even developed a special product, the whiskey poteen, from distilling the fermented tubers. Later on it was the Irish who taught the English and the Americans to use the plant. There were neither potatoes nor tomatoes in Bradford’s Plymouth or Winthrop’s Boston.

The Italian and the English names for the vegetable combine two early Spanish words. The Spanish adopted the Peruvian name papa for the white potato, and took over the Caribbean word batata for the sweet potato. Some Europeans confused the two sounds, and from that misunderstanding came the Italian patata, the English “potato,” and the Swedish potatis.

The Chinese Garden

The Chinese of Boston are most commonly immigrants or descendants of immigrants from south China, especially the region around Canton and Hong Kong. The area has a warm, wet climate and was blessed with a great variety of native plants. In addition to these Asian natives, the Chinese borrowed crops from every region of the earth, so that south China is a world vegetable catalogue. There is no tradition in China for allotment gardening, no provision of gardens in cities for those who do not own land, but there has been a very long tradition of urban agriculture, both in the form of gardening in small city parcels and in market gardening at the edge of town.25

The staples of the south of China are rice (Oryza sativa), soybean (Glycine max) curd, and various kinds of cabbages (Brassicas). Sweet and chili peppers from the Americas have become major crops, and carrots are also important, but the Chinese in Boston do
not attempt such field crops in their community gardens. Instead, like everyone else, they raise delicacies, plants they remember as being at the heart of their favorite dishes and plants whose flavor is enhanced for being fresh out of the garden.26

At present old women predominate among Boston's Chinese community gardeners. Their preponderance results from the intertwining of old social rules and the anomalies of the U.S. immigration laws, which for decades prevented Asian families from settling in America. A social worker, Amy Wang, explained the situation. Years ago, in the province of Canton, the custom had been to send sons overseas in the hope that they might prosper and in time return to their communities and their families. So young men married and spent a year or so with their wives and then went abroad to work. The wives remained in China, separated from their husbands except for occasional visits, for twenty, thirty, and forty years. These couples reunited only when the U.S. immigration laws were reformed in 1952; but now, years later, many of Boston's Chinese wives are widows.

These women, trained by customs of a different place and era, do not visit around. They stick to home because they are concerned for their reputations. According to Chinese custom it was not proper for two women to talk alone in a room. The reason for this prohibition lay in the community's fear of gossip: what might the two women say about others? On the other hand, a respectable and well-mannered lady might come upon a friend accidentally, and in such a circumstance, the two friends might speak together as long as they wished. The community garden, then, serves a very important function as a place of unplanned meetings for Chinese women.

The typical Chinese garden is a selection from an enormous catalogue of south China vegetables. Greens, squashes, melons, beans, peas, and radishes predominate. Since Boston Chinese speak half a dozen different south China dialects, it is impossible to give a single spelling to a plant name. Many of the Chinese in Boston are from the Toishan region, a city about sixty-five miles south and west of Canton, so the plants will be signified in three ways whenever possible: in Toishanese, with an English common name if one exists, and in Latin.27

Chinese gardeners have a long list of greens to choose from: cabbages, mustards, spinach, chives, and parsley. Some of the best-known and most popular greens in Boston are the bok toi (Brassica campestris chinensis), a long cylindrical cabbage much used in stir-fry dishes. Cooked, the leaves are eaten like spinach; the white stems taste like asparagus. Another very popular green is the guy toi (B. juncea), a non-heading, white, branched mustard, called Chinese mustard. It can be used raw in salads or it can be cooked like spinach. The root is also edible and can be boiled and served like celery. It has a more peppery taste than the bok toi. There is also a Chinese broccoli, guy lohn (B. alboglabra), which is similar in flavor to the European types and like them is eaten stems
and leaves. Many community garden plantings also include the cold-season Chinese celery cabbage, dai toi (B. pekinensis).

Chinese cooking depends on onions, and these are grown in many varieties. There are of course the common onions of biblical mention (Allium cepa) and garlic (A. sativum). Indeed, garlic is such an ancient plant in Chinese gardens that written Chinese gives it its own ideogram. These familiar onions are joined by a bunching onion with a hollow stem which grows in little clusters of four or five (A. fistulosum), the “Welsh onion.” These scallions grew in eastern Asia, and in the Middle Ages they reached Europe, where the Germans called them welsche, meaning foreign onions. The British, being poor linguists, mistook the German for the sound of “Welsh,” and henceforth they have been so labeled. A curiosity from the Chinese garden is the tree onion, or Egyptian onion (A. cepa bulbiferum), tchung, which sends out small bulbs on its flowering top. Finally, all south Chinese cook with gow choi (A. odoratum), a perennial garlic-flavored chive which has longer leaves than the common European chive (A. schoenoprasum), and the leaves are flattened toward their tips. The plant entered China at least two thousand years ago and was long regarded as an antidote to poison and a remedy for bleeding. Its oil does contain lots of sulfur, so it works as well, or as badly, as garlic.

Some of the Chinese garden plants are familiar to Americans because they are like plants known or used by everyone here. Hola ndo, snow peas (Pisum sativum, var. macrocarpon), are relatives of our common table varieties, and are becoming very popular in American gardens. Ai gwa, the Chinese eggplant (Solanum melongena), is just a narrow variety of our common egg-shaped vegetable. Gumjum, whose dried buds are stir-fried, is the “golden needles” day lily (Hemerocallis fulva). It was a cultivated Far Eastern plant which was imported to America, escaped the garden, and now grows wild across the United States.28

The dow gauk, the yard-long bean (Vigna sesquipedalis) seems more exotic. The bean grows wild in Africa and is cultivated in Europe and the United States as “cowpeas” for fodder and to improve the soil. Nevertheless, this bean is very nutritious and can be eaten fresh or dried. When grown on stakes, as with the community gardeners, the plants send out long, tender pods which can be cooked like our “French” string beans. The bean requires a hot summer, however, to perform well.29

Foo gwa is the bitter melon (Momordica charantia), a long, thin fuzzy vegetable which turns bright orange when it is fully ripe. Its pronounced bitterness comes from the presence of quinine in the fruit. When picked young, it stir-fries well, and it is often kept in brine to preserve it. The plant is also common in India, where it is used in pickles and curries.

Among the Chinese there is often an informal contest to see who can raise the largest
doan gwa, or winter melon (*Benincasa hispida*). Otherwise known as the wax gourd or white gourd, the plant is a very ancient cultivar; indeed, its origins go so far back in time, it is doubtful if a wild ancestor survives. This light-skinned melon grows as large as watermelon. It can be steamed, or added to soups for its spicy taste. Also, if the shell is dried it can be made into a small kettle or bowl.30

Perhaps two dozen or more species of vegetables are commonly grown by the Chinese community gardeners in Boston. The methods the gardeners use are well adapted to working in tight urban spaces. The basic plan is dense and vertical. Vegetables are grown very close together in raised beds. The ground is first deeply dug to loosen up the bed, and then the soil is heaped up above the path level and supported at its edges by boards, sticks, and stones. The bed is never walked on. Because the seeds are sown so thickly, the plants require a great deal of water and fertilizer to flourish. Chinese-style gardening is thus an active sport with frequent waterings and fertilizings. Finally, everything of any size is tied up on sticks, brush, or fences so that it will take the least ground and catch the most sun. Such gardens often appear very disorderly to the casual passer-by, but the method is very effective.

The Hispanic Garden

It is fitting that a book that began with eighteenth-century land enclosures in England should end with a review of Hispanic urban gardening. The Caribbean, Mexican, and Latin American migrants who come to the cities of the United States today bring with them a similar experience of a powerless poor shifting about, seeking homes and jobs in the face of powerful forces which are transforming country and city. There is the same breakup of longstanding rural economies in the face of large-scale commercial agriculture; the same inability or unwillingness to mobilize national resources to make land available for city building; the same callousness about the exploitation of farm laborers and the collapse of small tenant farming; and the same prodigal waste of human skills and energies in the pursuit of the profits of urbanization and industrialization.

Whereas in England the relief authorities instituted the charitable allotment garden, in Latin America a variety of small-scale experiments are underway. In Panama the Ministries of Health and Agriculture are teaching mothers to garden in the yards around their houses. In Lima, Peru, the government and the local school of agriculture run demonstration gardens in the new city slums, community gardens are set up in conjunction with day care centers, and a foreign relief agency is teaching school children gardening. In Managua, Nicaragua, a German volunteer is using teenagers to tend allotment gardens.31

The two great social revolutions of Latin America, the Mexican revolution of 1910 and
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the Cuban revolution of 1959, loom over such small interventions. Both attacked the organization of land. In the Mexican case, the state confiscated the lands of the Roman Catholic Church and broke up a few foreign-owned large estates. Further, under the Ejido decree of 1915 and subsequent legislation, it made some grants of small parcels to landless peasants. These plots, like the English allotments, were designed to be only large enough to stave off starvation; they were not big enough to support an entire family in the absence of outside employment. The same program established a few community gardens in the towns of Mexico, but the reform was choked off by the political opposition and local terrorism of the large landowners.32

In the Cuban revolution of 1959 ultimately 79 percent of all the nation's farmland was brought under state ownership, and the remaining small private farms were organized into producers' cooperatives. During the process of nationalization the revolutionary government stumbled into all sorts of mistakes of management, but after twenty years it succeeded in putting a stop to the malnutrition of the Cuban population, an accomplishment unique in Latin America today.33

Yet for most Caribbean and Latin American migrants the urban experience is that of shifting for themselves. Waves of their countrymen have been moving toward the cities and forming rings of squatter settlements on the fringes and wastelands of San Juan, Mexico City, Caracas, and the like. Here encampments become shanty towns, and in time shanty towns are rebuilt by their residents to become regular urban quarters.34

Especially during the first years of squatter settlements, in the times when the municipal authorities are often hostile, it is only through cooperative work by the settlers themselves that they secure water, electricity, and other services. Although Hispanic immigrants to the United States have not repeated the land-seizure tactics of the squatter settlements, they do bring some of the same community spirit to their urban gardens. Here in Boston the gardeners at a South End community garden set aside a corner of their land for a community gathering place, and they built a shed for tools, cooking, and parties. It is a practice unique to their garden.

It is the climate of United States cities, however, that requires the most changes for Hispanic gardeners. Many are moving from subtropical regions to cold northern weather. Therefore, many of the plants that they would grow in a family garden down home must be forgone and substitutions made from the standard list of United States vegetables. Nevertheless, despite the climate, the emphasis on the ancient New World diet of corn, beans, and squash is preserved.

The largest group of Hispanic migrants to Boston is from Puerto Rico, so they bring to the city Caribbean preferences. Back home Puerto Ricans, both in the country and the towns, plant bananas, plantain, and pigeon peas to serve as screening and fences for their yards. They also set out coconuts, mangos, and lemon and orange trees as the umbrellas
for a partially shaded tropical garden. Beneath this canopy they plant sweet potatoes, yams, taro, cassava, peanuts, amaranthus, okra, chili peppers, and tomatoes. Most of this preferred list of plants will not grow in a northern American city. Moreover, the very style of cultivation must be changed to meet United States conditions. In Puerto Rico, as in all tropical settings, gardeners practice intercropping, mixing together the fruit trees, the tall and short plants: the cassava and the squash, the peppers and the sweet potatoes, the corn and the beans. In the sun-poor north row cropping in full sun is the most successful technique.35

So, in Boston, Hispanic community gardeners plant lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, onions, chives, eggplant, sweet potatoes, and corn like their fellow gardeners. Their ethnic specialties thus become the hot and sweet peppers, cilantro, a variety of beans, special squashes, and a yam.

It seems likely that the blandness of the New World diet of corn, beans, and squash made the native peppers an attractive addition to the Indian cuisine. However it came to pass, peppers (Capsicum frutescens) in the several varieties that grew in the Americas were cultivated and used before Columbus reached the Caribbean. The Spanish then carried the peppers home, and soon they spread through the Mediterranean and traveled to the Orient. Within fifty years of Columbus's first voyage four varieties were reported growing in India.

A thin, long pepper (C. frutescens accuminatum) is the essence of Latin cooking. Its common name, the chili pepper, comes from its Mexican Indian name. It is also known as the cayenne pepper, and it is the active ingredient in Hungarian paprika. In Spain the same pepper is known as the pimiento. More familiar to American gardeners than this hot pepper is the sweet, or bell, pepper (C. frutescens grossum) which is used unripe as a green pepper in salads and for cooking, and ripe as a sweet red pepper. There are also several other varieties of the plant, each with its own intensity of flavor. An acrid pepper, cone pepper (C. frutescens conoides), is grown in Louisiana for Tabasco sauce, and the red cluster pepper (C. frutescens fasciculatum) is so hot that it burns the hands of the pickers.

In the old Puerto Rican island diet the peppers entered each day's meals as an essential element in the sofrito. Country families made a sauce of peppers, chopped onions, green tomatoes, lard or pork fat, and spices. This sauce was added to the core dish of rice, beans, and codfish.36

In Boston one of the most important Hispanic community garden crops is cilantro (Coriandrum sativum), or in common American usage, coriander. The plant when young resembles parsley, and is used a great deal in Hispanic, Chinese, and Indian cooking. Indeed, there is such local demand that some gardeners market their cilantro. The leaves, if picked when the plant is small, can be added to soups and salads, or the plant can be
left to grow to maturity (about two feet tall), and to send out its umbrella of small flowers and seeds. The ground seeds make a useful spice. Today they are an important ingredient in curries; years ago they were part of the recipe for flavoring gin.

Coriander is presumed to have had its origin in the Mediterranean, where it grows wild and as a weed, as well as being a cultivar. Its name in Latin, coriandrum, means bug. The association came from the odor the plant gives off when it is bruised. Drying the plant ends the off-smell.

Squashes (Cucurbita species) are among the most ancient of New World domestic plants. Remains of some have been dug up in sites which date back to 7000 B.C. As a group of plants they flourish wild as weeds, and as cultivars in Central America. The variety C. pepo comes in many forms ranging from the patty pan and yellow summer squash on to the pumpkin. Hispanic gardeners have brought two unfamiliar ones to the city, a round, yellow squash that they call by the general plant name calabasa, and a round, green one called haullama.

Only in the occasional large garden plots do Hispanic gardeners give over scarce space to corn, but all Hispanic gardeners plant several varieties of beans. The common American bean (Phaseolus vulgaris), like the squash, has many varieties. The frijoles, a white bean not unlike the Boston baked bean, the frijoles negros, black beans, the habichuelas coloradas, kidney beans, and the pinto beans with the spots are found in Hispanic community gardens. Also, as in Central America, gardeners plant the scarlet runner bean (P. multiflorus) as a vegetable, not just as an ornament.

Two rather different species of beans, less familiar to North Americans, are also common: jack beans (Canavalia obtusifolia) and gandulas, or pigeon-peas (Cajanus cajan). The origin of the jack bean is unknown, but it has been used in such scattered parts of the earth as the West Indies, Polynesia, and the Orient since the earliest historical times. Archaeologists in Mexico discovered such beans in places that date back to 3000 B.C. These beans have flat pods and edible leaves. In the West Indies they are known as “seaside beans,” and seeds and pods are boiled together as you would an edible-podded pea.

The gandulas are natives of Africa or India. They were cultivated in Egypt before 2000 B.C. and in prehistoric India and Madagascar. The young seeds are eaten like a vegetable, cooked like a lima bean, and the mature seeds can be dried and split and used like a lentil. In Puerto Rico these beans are called cajan, or no-eyed peas.

Finally, like their Afro-American neighbors the Hispanic-Americans also plant sweet potatoes (Ipomoea batatas) and īname, or yams (Dioscorea trifida). This last species is native to America and is often grown in the Caribbean. Unlike some yams, it does not bury its tubers deep beneath the ground but sends out about twelve sweet tubers near the surface. It is also known as the cushcush yam.
NOTES TO PART THREE


9. Unless a special additional footnote is given, the histories of plants which follow were constructed out of the information given in the following books. Each book lists the vegetable under its Latin name, so all the data can be easily located without the necessity of page numbers. When additional sources were consulted, each source has been provided with its own footnote: S. G. Harrison, G. B. Masefield, and Michael Wallis, The Oxford Book of Food Plants (London, 1969); Yann Lovelock, The Vegetable Book: An Unnatural History (New York, 1972); Ames; and Edgar Anderson, Plants, Man, and Life (Berkeley, Calif., 1967). In those cases in which the authorities disagree, I have relied upon Anderson's interpretation. The late professor Anderson was for many years the director of the Missouri Botanic Gardens in St. Louis and an authority on the history of economic plants.


11. Nancy M. Page and Richard E. Weaver, Jr., Wild Plants in the City (New York, 1975), 17.

12. Some authorities have questioned the biblical references to cucumbers as a vegetable of ancient Egypt. They argue that the cucumber arrived in Europe from China around the first century B.C. Sturtevant's Notes, 208. The usual account is that of Haughton, 86–90; or Winifred Walker, All the Plants of the Bible (New York, 1957), 64–65.


17. Ames, 44–49.


22. Giovanni Brino, “Urban Farmers in Turin,” Space & Society 5 (September 1982): 50–57; and Giovanni Brino et al., Ort i urbani a T orino (Firenze, 1982). In 1986 Fabio Giavedoni and Aurelio Alaimo of the University of Bologna took photographs of the municipal, private, and illegal squatters’ community gardens of that city. These pictures can be seen at the Rotch Visual Collections, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.


30. Ames, 86.


33. Nancy Forster and Howard Handler, “Food Production and Distribution in Cuba: The

