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SUBJECT: "OUR VANISHING WILD FLOWERS." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry. U. S. D. A.

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Some of the most beautiful things in the United States are rapidly disappearing. Our native wild flowers are dying out at such an alarming rate that Americans of the future may never be able to enjoy the blooms we have been taking for granted all these years. Many of the flowers that visitors from all over the world have admired may pass from the face of the earth unless Americans do something quickly to save them.

This warning comes from P. L. Ricker, plant scientist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and one of the leaders in the movement to protect our wild flowers.

Perhaps you are wondering why our wild flowers are dying out. Well, Mr. Ricker says our system of land development has been destroying the flowers for a good many years. The woodsman's axe, clearing and cultivating farm lands, building up cities, close grazing of fields and woodlands, forest fire and erosion of soil are all responsible for the loss of our wild flowers. Many of Nature's free gifts to this country have been disappearing together. Clearing the land as we have has destroyed our trees, our valuable soil, our birds and game, and our wild flowers as well. Many places that were once natural flower gardens are now gullied and bare, or overgrown by unsightly weeds.

Of course, picking wild flowers has had a part in destroying them, but a small part compared to digging up the whole plant of rare flowers and carrying it home to set out in the garden, as thousands of people have done and still are doing. Most of the transplanted wild flowers die under changed conditions. Most home grounds are different from the flower's native woodland, and few home gardeners know all the many secrets of growing wild plants.

Beside the home gardeners who try to transplant wild flowers many plant dealers now dig them up and offer them for sale. A number of dealers in this country dig up and transplant in their nurseries as many as a hundred thousand wild plants a year. These dealers won't go to the trouble of raising wild flowers themselves for sale when they can get them free for the digging.

Unfortunately, the rarer the plant, the more eager dealers are for it. This is the case with some of our most beautiful flowers like the orchids, the lilies, the gentians, and blooms of the heath family. In the far West the Pacific Coast Pitcher-Plant is disappearing fast because dealers have found it sells well. They advertise it as an insect catcher. This advertising along with the curious appearance of the plant makes it a best-seller. But the scientists say the plant is of little or no help in catching flies or other insects around the house or garden. And what is more, the plant is so difficult to grow out of its native haunts that it soon dies.

In the East another insect-catching plant is now being exploited. This is the Venus Fly-Trap. The Venus Fly-Trap is still abundant in some places, but now that dealers are digging it up for sale, its days may be numbered. One plant company alone buys a hundred thousand of these plants a year. Of course, most of the plants die after they are sold. And even if they live for awhile, they're of no value in catching flies.

In the East the wild flowers that are disappearing most rapidly are the fragrant, pink-and-white trailing arbutus, and the pink ladyslipper. These two flowers have suffered most from picking and digging. In the West the Mariposa lily is going fast. And so is the Sego lily--so remarkable for its beauty that it was chosen State flower of Utah.

Mr. Ricker and the members of the Wild Flower Preservation Society believe the only way to save our wild flowers is to establish permanent wild flower sanctuaries--acres set aside just for the flowers to grow and be safe from the pickers

and diggers. Another idea is to set aside wild life sanctuaries where neither flowers, nor birds, nor game can be destroyed. Birds and flowers go well together for the fruits of the flowers often provide favorite food for the birds. Already some sanctuaries have been established. Mr. Ricker says nearly every county in the United States might profit from a wild life sanctuary.

Of course, our National Parks, and State and National Forests already offer some refuge for wild flowers and wild life. In the East the Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway with over a hundred miles of scenic beauty are fast becoming an Eastern wild flower sanctuary. But nothing in the East equals the fields of blue-bonnets in Texas, say, or the colorful displays of many different wild flowers in the mountain meadows of California and the Rocky Mountain States. Fortunately, for the flowers, and for all Americans who enjoy flowers, some of these natural wild flower gardens are likely to remain that way because they are too rocky for anything but grazing.

Mr. Ricker finds Westerners, particularly Californians, more interested in wild flowers than Easterners. He says in 1933 California distributed a very attractive booklet with color plates of the wild flowers of the State. The pamphlet was free. And it did a great deal toward interesting people in the wild flowers. The radio stations in California followed up with wild flower chats, telling people about the flowers they could see on different drives all over the State. As a result every week-end now, especially in spring, thousands of California autoists go out to see nature's wonderful display of blooms. They go out to see and enjoy but not to pick or dig the flowers.

Mr. Ricker says saving our wild flowers is largely a matter of getting Americans interested--in letting them know what they are losing so they will join together to save these gifts of nature.

