

From My Kitchen Window

For the first time in my life I enjoy "doing" the dishes. I'll tell you why. It is because my sink is under the kitchen windows and we have a view. One of my friends exclaimed when she saw the kitchen in the little house we built, "Think of washing the dishes with all that to look at!"

I haven't always lived in the country, and I have washed my dishes where I could not see out. When I face a blank wall my mind isn't interested enough to shut out the gossipy news I may have heard, and it has a tendency to dwell on the commonplace, work-a-day things. But I defy anyone to think small, mean thoughts with a bit of scenery to watch.



If my home should ever again be where I lack a view I would do my best to make one. It is remarkable what can be accomplished in that line.

To be sure, we are blessed with a lot of natural beauty, but we have given it considerable help in spots.

Not long ago, a rather prominent flower grower asked me who did our landscaping. Dear me, we did it ourselves and didn't even think of it as landscaping-- it was just ordinary planting of the things we like in the places where we wanted them. And some of them are in sight of the kitchen windows.



There is our young apple orchard sloping down to the wood-lot to the north of it. I feel genuinely sorry for the person who can't get enthusiastic over an orchard, particularly a growing orchard he has

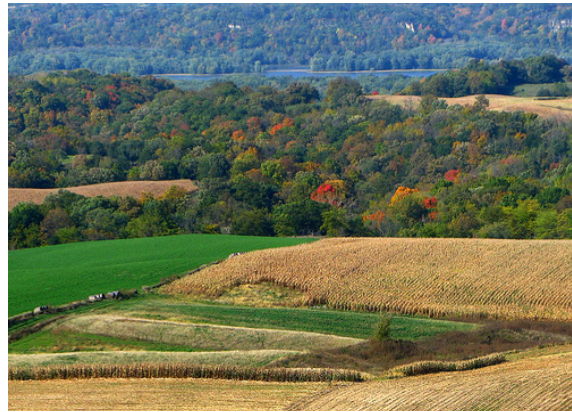
planted himself. It was a real thrill last spring when for the first time I saw our trees loaded with blooms.



Our orchard isn't so large that we can't take a personal interest in each tree, and when the Duchess set a nice lot of fruit, we fairly petted it along. The man of the place made a regular early morning pilgrimage to that tree. I'd see him while I was at those dishes, and he would grin and wave at me.



This morning was a far-view morning; I could see for miles. The little lake in the middle distance was a shining gem of a lake.



There were tents of corn shocks, patches of woodland, and color everywhere. The sumac-filled ravine at the edge of the woods, where we take our meals when the spirit moves us to eat outdoors, was a sight worth seeing. Do you know what sumac and sassafras look like in the fall?



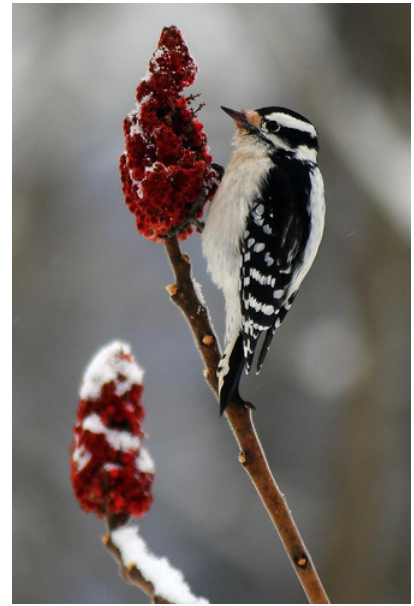
Staghorn Sumac

Indian of our native shrubs. It goes in tribes and believes in plenty of color, regular wild Indian reds and yellows, and it wears a year-round headdress of crimson seed plumes. The sassafras is a pale-face settler that can't quite equal the gorgeousness of his sumac neighbors, though he does the best he can in a modest, more civilized way. We have altogether too much sumac on this place and go out every year and pull it out where it encroaches on our domain. We get "riled up" over the way it asserts itself and makes claims we can't allow, but at the same time we should regret really subduing it to extinction.



Sassafras

Our resident birds are beginning to take notice of their suet in its usual place on the elm tree we set just across the drive. I watched two nuthatches and a pair of downy woodpeckers get their breakfast to-day. The downies appeal to me because they are such economical creatures. If they drop a crumb they back down that tree and



pick it up and eat it then and there, holding it against the tree trunk with their little downy chests. I have strong suspicions that the nuthatches don't remember where they hide half the chunks they carry off. Those nuthatches always do their climbing and eating with their heads pointing down. It's my opinion that a bird standing on its head can't have quite as good a brain as a right-side-up bird.

There is always something inspiring to see out those kitchen windows. One day last week, when I went out to fill the teakettle for supper, there was a flock of about a dozen crows flying over the west alfalfa field against



a long, low golden-pink sunset cloud. I stood and watched them out of sight while my teakettle ran over. Why, I'm part owner of those crows! They have their headquarters in our woods. And I'm sole owner of the picture they made against that evening sky. You notice I allow the Creator His share in those birds. Isn't it surprising how generous we can be when a thing not a perfect blessing? There seems to be some question about crows belonging to the angel class of birds; we call them dark angels and like the old rascals in spite of their wickedness.



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Last year a pair of cardinals came every day for at least a week and investigated the honeysuckle bush just below my windows. If they ever nest there I will surely mark that spring as one of the eventful ones on this place.



It was a temptation to put a bird bath across the drive where it could be seen from the kitchen, though we knew the birds might not like the cars driving near when they were wet and not

able to fly far. Finally our good judgment prevailed over our desires and we planted a lilac bush, some

privet, and a few little evergreens to mark the line between lawn and orchard.

I haven't yet decided at what season of the year I like the woodland best. I love the trees in winter.

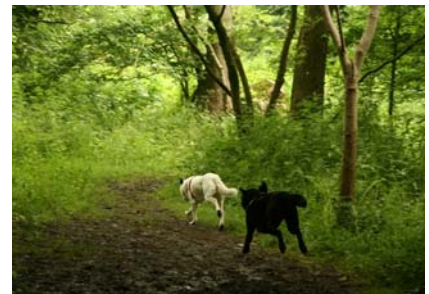


That is when we really see the Majesty of our towering oaks. And the young oaks along the outskirts of the older wood are the friendliest little trees. They keep their

warm brown leaves all winter and are the most inviting cozy-looking, comfortable babies.



One sunny late-winter day I saw a skunk meander along the hill and under those trees to a wild raspberry thicket and curl down for a nap. Really that woodspussy showed remarkably good sense—it selected the exact spot that I would have chosen! The animals, both wild and tame, were in evidence on that particular morning. It was only a few minutes until a woodchuck went ambling past that same thicket. But woodchucks meant nothing in the skunk's placid life. However, when a couple stray dogs appeared on the scene it was an entirely different matter.



As soon as transplanting time comes we intend to move some of our young Norway spruces down among the oaks in that hollow. We have raised those spruces from seedlings about as big as a toothpick. They are large enough now to add to the view, especially when the snow makes regular Christmas trees of them. And what fun we will have watching the little beauties grow!



Each season brings its own interest to the scenes outside my windows, and I've learned more about the birds and animals than I ever did before in the regular walks taken for the purpose. I'm wondering what I'll see during my next dishwashing job—I'm anxious for it to come because I like to do dishes now. And I really mean that.



Leota E. Kean

Note: This essay was most likely written from Leota's farm where she lived with her husband, Ralph, a high school teacher, in Bertrand Township, Michigan in approximately 1907.