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The Stouffville Tribune

# Cedar Grove Farm Self-Serve Garden

(June 16)

A poor year in a farming com-  
munity is hardly newsworthy.  
It becomes worthy of the news,  
however, when a farmer turns  
a bad year into a good business.  
Gib Whittamore's basic crop  
was strawberries and in 1957  
the crop was so poor it did not  
pay him to hire pickers to har-  
vest the meagre yield. Rather  
than see the fruit go to waste,  
Gib and his wife Evelyn, hung  
up a sign inviting passing mo-  
torists to stop and help them-  
selves to berries at fifteen cents  
a quart. This worked surpris-  
ingly well and that practically  
worthless crop brought in about  
a hundred and fifty dollars.

The following year, 1958, was  
a dry year and resulted in the  
same problem. Out went the  
sign for the second time. The  
nucleus of a business was in  
the making. Later that year,  
tomatoes were added to the pick-  
it-yourself garden.

In 1959 the Pick Your Own  
Produce business at Whittam-  
ore's Farm was well under-  
way with strawberries, peas and  
tomatoes as the main crops.  
Although Gib says there is  
nothing new in this do-it-your-  
self kind of market gardening,  
nevertheless there were no re-  
ferences available, no rules to  
assure success in the venture.  
The Whittamores had to antici-  
pate problems and overcome  
them as best they could.

Many people think this is a  
pretty easy way to make a liv-  
ing — you just put the plants  
in the ground and wait for cus-  
tomers, but it isn't quite that  
simple. This is a business enter-  
prise based on a certain psychol-  
ogy, preceded by solid ground-  
work and an excellent system  
of advertising. The psychology  
of the business hinges on two  
facts: people love a bargain; a  
day picking strawberries for  
your own consumption is a joy,  
picking them every day for a  
living is not.

Even though the Whittamores  
are knowledgeable gardeners  
and wise in the ways of human  
dealings, some of the peculiari-  
ties of their amateur pickers  
still provide them with a few  
surprises. They have a tremen-  
dous cross-section of people  
hovering over their berry patch.  
It is strange but true that on  
the days when berries are plen-  
tiful so are people, but on days  
when the berries are few, so  
are the pickers. There is some  
kind of astonishing grape-vine  
that seems to send word around.  
Some pickers want their mon-  
ey's worth and fill the boxes to  
overflowing so that they cannot  
leave the patch without picking  
most of the berries two or three  
times. The Whittamores don't  
chastise if that's the way they  
like it. But another kind of per-  
son whom Gib feels a little sor-  
ry for, is the picker who never  
fills his box quite full. And what  
about the back fence jumpers?  
In a business of this kind there  
is almost sure to be people who  
jump the fence, pick at the  
far end of the field and steal off  
with their loot. Gib says this is  
very rare. Most people pay even  
if they have to come to the  
house to find a cashier. The only  
precaution against stealing  
is snow fence and, to quote Gib,  
"It's pretty hard to jump a  
snow fence." But there are still  
places they could get in to steal  
berries if they wanted to do it  
that way. They don't.  
Although new people are con-

stantly appearing, many of the  
same pickers turn up for each  
crop in turn—strawberries, peas  
and tomatoes. Elderly couples,  
who cannot pick a full day, will  
often come in the morning,  
work for a while and, after a  
picnic lunch at the side of the  
road, go back to finish the job.

There are few rigid rules at  
Whittamore Farm and anything  
that makes the work easier is  
acceptable. They do discourage  
dogs and small children play-  
ing tag in the fruit and they  
ask smokers to remember ber-  
ries are mulched in straw.

Pick It Yourself market gar-  
dening does not lend itself to  
every kind of crop. Through ex-  
perience and anticipation Gib  
has decided that strawberries,  
peas and tomatoes are good  
crops for amateur pickers. Such  
things as corn, cucumbers,  
pumpkins and asparagus are  
better picked beforehand and  
sold at the side of the road.  
Beans are good but not popular  
enough to warrant a large crop.  
There are plans afoot for rasp-  
berries, red and black currants  
and gooseberries.

What are the problems of a  
market gardener in a new busi-  
ness of this kind? The crop  
itself is of primary importance  
and Gib is still experimenting  
with varieties to produce the  
best for the purpose. It is nar-  
rowly impossible to combine a pick-  
it-yourself enterprise with  
wholesale selling. It must be  
one or the other. The necessity  
to live up to their advertising  
has led Gib to plan for irrigation  
of the land to insure a full yield.  
His system of irrigation, though  
still in its infancy, saved the to-  
mato crop last year.

The planting of strawberries  
is quite a problem. Dormant  
plants are dug up in Simcoe  
county in March and kept in  
coolers until planting time here.  
This year they were set into  
the earth, still dormant, the sec-  
ond week of June.  
Weeding is done fairly ade-  
quately by four dozen beautiful  
white Chinese Geese. They stroll  
lazily up and down the rows eat-  
ing grass, tasting weeds, look-  
ing very pretty but never de-  
veloping a taste for strawber-  
ries. At the end of the season  
their reward for labour is, un-  
fortunately, the guillotine. New  
ones with new energy are bro-  
ught in each spring, to prevent  
the Whittamores from unwill-  
ingly entering the poultry busi-  
ness.

What is the future of the  
Pick It Yourself Market Gar-  
den? The word has spread and  
habits are easily formed. A  
day in the country in a berry  
patch is a delightful family  
activity for many a suburban  
dweller. The rare treat of get-  
ting absolutely fresh produce at  
just the right time for eating  
or canning is worth the bend-  
ing. The saving to the mortgage  
conscious housewife is a big  
consideration. The public finds  
it all in their favour. This year  
strawberries will be ready in  
about two weeks at 20 cents a  
quart, peas will not be avail-  
able but tomatoes should be ripe  
and ready right after Exhibi-  
tion.

Crop spraying and other tech-  
nical problems are often work-  
ed to a solution with the help  
of a field man from the Dept. of  
Agriculture or good salesmen  
from reputable firms selling  
seed, spray or equipment. These  
men stand high in Gib's estima-  
tion and he makes use of their

knowledge and heeds their ad-  
vice. As far as the Pick It Your-  
self business is concerned, how-  
ever, it is a trial and error propo-  
sition, for Gib and Evelyn  
Whittamore. To date there have  
been many trials and appar-  
ently few errors.

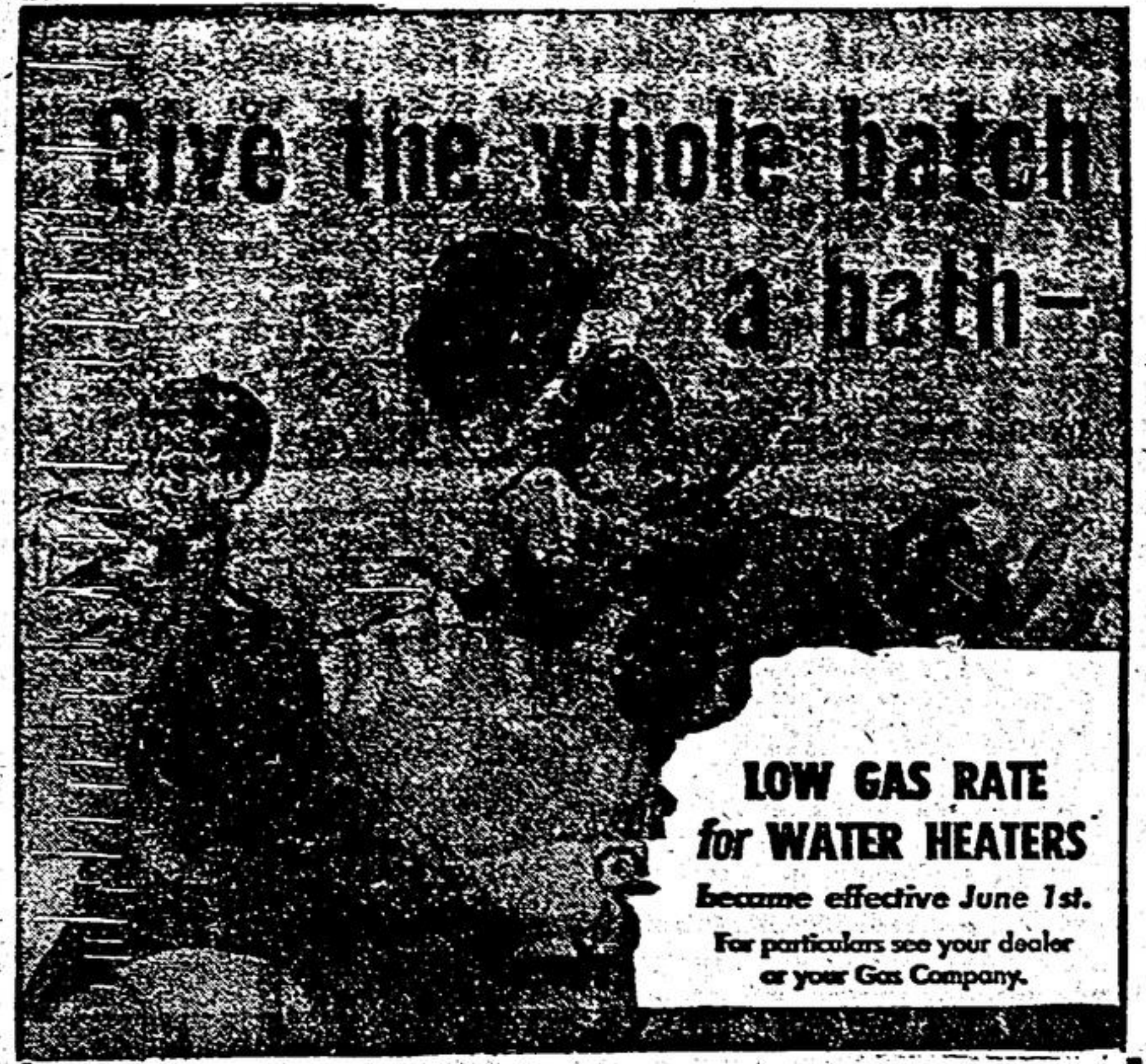
**Garden Party July 2** —  
Cedar Grove Annual Garden  
Party will be held in Cedarena  
on the evening of July 2nd. The  
programme lineup is excellent.  
Watch this column next week  
for all the details.

**Notes about Neighbours** —  
John Petrie spent a few days  
in New York last week and  
Blodwen Davies has just re-  
turned from a visit to Toronto.

A group of Mennonite young  
people spent a very pleasant  
day in the Collingwood area  
last Thursday which included a  
visit to a Potter's studio.

**Mothers** — Don't forget the  
Mother's Club meeting to be  
held Thursday, June 16th, 8.30  
p.m. at Jean Crichton's, "When  
We Are Married," J. B. Priest-  
ly's highly amusing comedy  
will provide the highlight of the  
programme.

It is reported that some kan-  
garoo meat has been mislab-  
elled and sold for human con-  
sumption in the United States.  
That may explain why some Ameri-  
cans have recently been more  
jumpy than usual.



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