

*Gardening, which eliminates backaches, blisters, and most of the time-consuming labor essential for production of plenty of vegetables, is on wing throughout Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and West Virginia. Its application results in better and earlier green vegetables. Extensive home gardening is possible on every farm without competing with field crop production. Mister Grower, shake hands with mulch-paper magic, the rural gardener's new assistant.*

# Mulch Paper Gardening In Maryland

By George H. Dacy

**W**EATHER at your order from the paper mull is the best way in which I can describe the paper system of gardening. I speak from experience. I have practiced this simplified system of gardening successfully in my own Maryland back yard for the last eight years. My abridged form of paper farming has yielded splendid vegetables in wet years, droughty years, and normal seasons. It insures early vegetables ready for the table several weeks and sometimes as much as one month earlier than those of your neighbors, who garden via the old-fashioned soil-mulch method. Rainfall, which is so light and limited as to be of little benefit to an unpapered garden, provides plenty of moisture for the paper-mulched plantings. The paper is so laid that practically all moisture, which falls, drains directly into the vegetable rows where the water does the most good.

You can plant your garden about two weeks earlier than customary if you mulch with black impervious acid-proof paper which radiates heat from the sun to the extent that early in the Spring the soil underneath the paper is from 8 to

10 degrees warmer than unprotected soil. The paper mantle conserves soil moisture by preventing surface evaporation. During the drought of 1934 when rain had not fallen for over a month my Maryland garden soil was moist underneath the paper cover to a depth of three to four inches. Neighboring soil exposed to the sun's rays was baked dry.

During the driest seasons, my garden yielded at least four-fifths of normal production. It was an oasis of profitable production as compared with adjoining unpapered tracts.

## Two Crops Possible

As a rule, vegetables, grown in this new manner, are mature for table use from two to four weeks earlier than similar foods from orthodox gardens. Many progressive gardeners now produce two crops annually of certain vegetables where formerly they were limited to a single crop on account of the restricted growing season.

Here is what your Uncle Sam through the Department of Agriculture reports about mulch-papered gardens: "Paper mulch will hold moisture in the surface four inches of soil for at least

17 days after a given rainfall, and occasionally even longer. The moisture in the soil two days after an ordinary rain is at least one-sixth greater under the paper mulch than in exposed soil in the same plot." These results emanate from governmental experiments at Arlington Farm, Virginia.

Mulch paper prevents strawberries, canteloupes, watermelons, tomatoes, squash, and pumpkins from coming into direct contact with the soil. The use of paper accompanies increased yields. You will be safe in estimating an increased return of from 30 to 50 per cent in vegetables when you mulch with protective paper as compared with the ordinary soil-mulched method. You will find the "papered" green vegetables superior in quality to millrun stuff you formerly grew.

## Good Five Years

Paper-mulch gardening favors intensive cultivation and the efficient use of all the soil surface for food production. Inter-row crops will succeed better than ever previously in your gardening experience. Beets, carrots, and spinach can be raised satisfactorily between rows of corn, beans, squash, and other wide-row crops. You can yoke the ordinarily wasted fencerow space under the paper protection system for service by planting pole beans, English peas or similar climbing crops which require support and by using the woven wire or chicken wire boundary of the garden as trellises. By this intensive use of the garden area, you will be able to raise a sequence of garden vegetables from early summer until late Fall.

You can use regulation mulch paper which sells for about \$6.50 per roll of 500 square feet—that paper can be left on the garden continuously for five years as far north as Washington, D. C. It must be replaced the sixth year. Where it is used, one plowing suffices for five years. Annually after the first season, the gardener must stir the soil in the plant rows with a hoe or garden trowel. It is advisable to fertilize plant rows with well-rotted and pulverized manure or a complete commercial fertilizer. That plant food will speed early growth. This system sounds fantastic, but as we personally operate our home garden successfully with one plowing in five years, we can vouch for the fact that it works.

## Another Method

If you question the wisdom of the rather heavy expenditure which you will have to make for commercial mulch paper made for the purpose, here is another practical method which you may pursue at less cost. You can use ordinary impervious black asphalt building paper which costs about \$1.25 a roll of 500 square feet. That paper will last only one year, but is satisfactory for a single growing season. Such paper comes in rolls 36 inches wide; you will have to cut the rolls cross-wise in the middle



Mulch paper is easily applied with a home-made unrolling device. The principal materials for the machinery are a broom handle and wire or cord.

with an old saw to make 18-inch widths of paper for the narrow-row vegetables.

The best plan in applying the paper is to insert an old broom handle in the open core of the roll, fastening the free ends of a heavy wire or cord to the ends of the handle. The broom handle acts as a roller. Grasping the improvised handle at the center, the gardener walks down the middle of the row, applying the mulch as he goes. The first strip of paper is applied as a border along one side of the garden. Then the second lap of paper is laid, leaving a two-inch space of exposed soil surface between the two strips of mulch material; it is the plant row. As each inter-row space is papered, clods of dirt, loose soil, or rocks are placed as weights at intervals to hold the paper in position against wind. Without much trouble you can make staples of number 10 galvanized wire as wide as the width of the row and with prongs six to eight inches long which can be thrust into the soil to hold the paper in position. Similar staples can be made of lathe or strips nailed to stakes driven in the ground.

The paper mulch warms the soil underneath the cover and facilitates exceptionally early planting. The gardener who has already planted his garden old-fashioned style may still be able to shift to the paper system by applying this mulch when vegetables are from several inches to six or eight inches high. Even when applied late, the paper will pay in the cultivation labor it saves and the efficient use which it makes of the light rains and heavy dews. Seedling plants, such as tomatoes, sweet potatoes, cabbage, and the like, may be planted through small holes cut in the paper.

## Easy to Weed

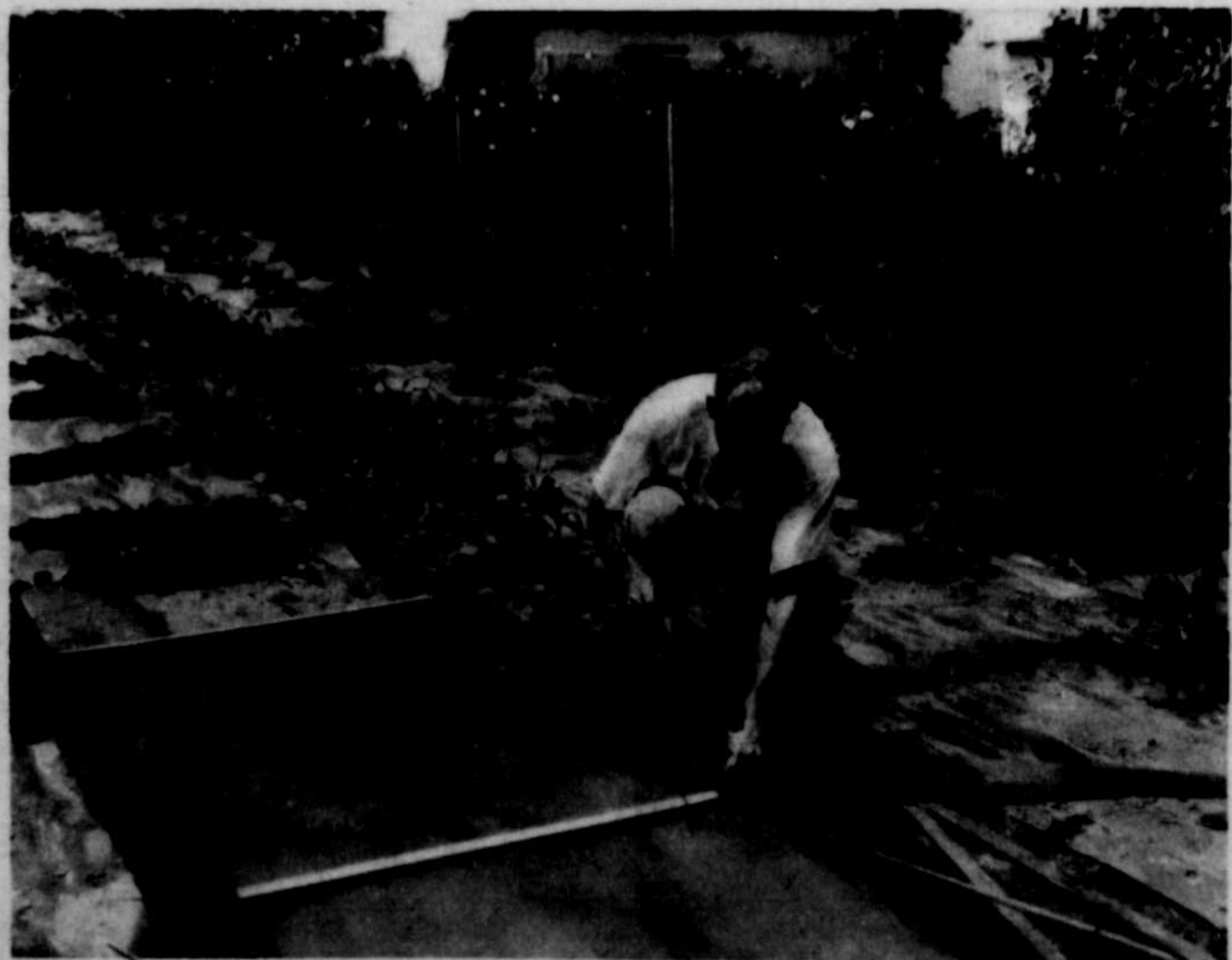
The plant rows, not being protected with paper mulch, will produce some weeds. Hence, you may have to spend an hour or so, once every ten days walking along the rows and pulling those weeds by hand. If you will be persistent in that practice, you will have a weedless garden. The paper, and loose soil or clods which hold it in place, serve as a carpet upon which you can walk without damaging the mulch. In wet weather these "paths" enable you to harvest vegetables despite the weather.

Where you practice the paper-mulch system you will not be troubled nearly as much as formerly by vagrant birds—seed-stealers whose activities jeopardize the stand. Apparently, the mulch serves as an unofficial scarecrow.

With the paper-mulch garden there is no longer need for the average housewife or farm wife to play the role of hoeman during the hot of the day when she should be resting.



The paper is applied around vigorous, healthy ponderosa tomato plants, saving plenty of cultivating labor.



Wooden strips nailed to stakes hold the paper in place. A garden thus prepared will be mulched efficiently for four years.