

Horticulture.

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THE FRUIT GARDEN.

Peaches and Nectarines in Pots.

If bushes of only a moderate size be required, 11 inch pots may be used. It is surprising to see the vigorous growth and fine fruit of peach trees in 11 inch pots; for owing to the compost being rammed down, a large quantity of nutriment is comprised in small space. I may as well, however, state once for all, and for all descriptions of fruit, that if fewer and larger trees be required, larger pots may be employed; thus, 13, 15, or 18 inch pots may be used with equal success. A peach or nectarine tree may thus, in two or three years, be made capable of bearing many dozens of fruit; but I must confess that my taste inclines to small prodigious trees, because one can have a greater variety in a small space; and small trees are pretty, and easily looked over, so that each leaf and bud, each blossom and fruit is known. If peach trees already in pots, and in a bearing state, can be purchased, so much the better, for then a year is saved; but as such are more expensive than either "maiden" or "cut-down" trees, these had better be purchased. I may here state that "cut-down" trees are two years old, and if nice healthy trees with fully ripened shoots can be found, they are better than "maiden" trees. But as they are not often to be met with, I will first give the treatment required by one-year-old or "maiden" trees.

Pruning.

The trees have one shoot, more or less vigorous, which should be well furnished with buds towards its base. This shoot must be cut clean off with a sharp knife at the seventh bud from its base, and the tree then potted towards the end of October. This season is recommended, but it may be departed from; for my peaches and nectarines are sometimes not potted till March, yet they make fine growth. The following summer every bud will, or ought to produce a shoot. If there are seven shoots the tree is formed for the season; they need not have their tops pinched off, but will merely require the laterals (small side-shoots) pinched off to within two buds of their bases, as soon as they are four inches long. This will induce the ripening of the shoots, so that by the end of the summer they will be full of blossom-buds. At the end of August the point of each shoot should be pinched off, and they will then only require the annual pruning, either in autumn or in spring, for which directions are given. If the tree puts forth a fewer number of shoot than seven, the tops of all should be pinched off early in June, each shoot will then put forth three or more young shoots; all that are not required to form the tree must be pinched off in the same way as laterals, leaving seven, or, if the tree be vigorous, nine shoots to each tree. These trifling manipulations are easy to do, but difficult to describe; so, to make the matter as clear as possible, let us place a young tree before us early in June, with five branches, each 12 inches in length; then let us, with a sharp knife shorten each branch to nine inches; then, at the end of June, let us take the same tree in hand, and we shall find that each shortened branch has put forth two or three shoots; we must pinch these so as to leave on four branches two, and on one only one, making nine shoots, which as they grow should have their laterals pinched off regularly; they will then make vigorous trees in one summer, and form an abundance of blossom-buds. No other pruning is necessary the first season; and if abundant ventilation and syringing daily have been attended to, the fruit buds will, towards the end of August, begin to be fully developed. The experienced gardener can at once distinguish them: such a person may prune his trees early in October. Let me endeavour to tell how to distinguish a fruit-bud, which, by the way, is the only bud to prune down to.

Fruit-buds and Wood-buds.

Towards the base of each of your seven or nine shoots, you will find four or five pointed single buds, covered with their brown coats: these are leaf-buds.

Next to these, and higher up the shoots are triple buds—a plump silver-coated one on each side, and a thin one in the centre; these plump silvery buds are blossom-buds, and the central one a leaf-bud, which produces a shoot so necessary to the well-being of the blossom-buds, that without it they would be abortive. Be sure to have on each shoot, if possible, nine to twelve of these triple buds, and cut off the shoot close to one of them; if this cannot be found at the proper place, so as to be able to form the foundation of a nice, regularly-shaped, bush-like tree, cut off the shoot at a leaf-bud. If the trees be pruned in autumn, the buds are difficult to distinguish: it will, therefore, be better for the beginner not to prune his peach and nectarine trees till March, when every bud will plainly show its character. If the shoot be cut off at a single blossom-bud, it will die down to the next leaf-bud; this must, therefore, be carefully avoided.

Spring Pruning.

Let us now proceed to the culture of our maiden tree. A season has passed; it is early spring, and our tree, with its nine branches of the last summer's growth, is before us, three of these should be cut down to within five buds of their bases, to give a supply of young shoots for the succeeding year, and six should be cut down, so as to leave on each branch ten or twelve triple buds. These are the fruit-bearing branches for the present season—and so it must be every year; a few branches, say one-third, must be cut closely on opposite sides of the tree, to give young shoots, and the remainder left as above to bear fruit. Those shoots that have borne fruit will often require to be cut out, to make the tree dwarf and prevent its becoming naked, as the spurs die after bearing, unlike those of the apricot and plum, which continue to bear fruit for many years. Much will depend upon the sort cultivated, and the vigour of the tree. One thing must be borne in mind—do not let the tree become bare of young shoots towards its base, and tall and straggling. If pruned in spring, the nature of every bud may be seen, and the tree formed, by the proper use of the knife, into a fruitful beautiful bush. When the trees are in a bearing state, many short spur-like shoots, from four to six inches long, will be made every season on the stem and towards the base of the principal branches. These will be generally covered with single blossom buds and a terminal leaf-bud; they may be removed if too much crowded, but never shortened. From twelve to fifteen leading shoots should be left, in summer pruning, on each tree when in full bearing state. I have thus endeavoured to follow the "maiden" tree to its fruiting state. The "cut-down" tree, which should have four or five branches, should be potted in autumn and pruned in early spring: each branch must be shortened to six inches; these will put forth numerous young shoots, which in June should be thinned out with a sharp knife, leaving nine or more shoots to be pruned the following spring as above directed.

Summer Pinching

Pruning of bush-trees by summer pinching only has been practised here to a large extent. As this is the most simple of all the methods of pruning known, and may be practised by any lover of gardening who does not mind employing his finger and thumb when walking in his orchard house, it is worthy of a few lines of description. A peach or nectarine tree of the usual bush-like form, two, three, or four years old, may be potted in the autumn. In March its shoots should be shortened to about half their length, forming the tree into a round bush. In May it will put forth young shoots. As soon as they have made four or five leaves, the fourth leaf, with the end of the shoot, must be pinched off, leaving three leaves, exclusive of one or two small leaves at the base of the shoot, which are without buds; every shoot must be thus operated on. In eight or ten days a fresh crop of shoots will show itself, for from the bud at the base of every leaf a shoot will spring forth. These, so soon as they are ready, must all be pinched down to three leaves, and so on all through the summer with every fresh crop of young shoots till the end of July; for if the pinching be continued till the end of August, a great number of the shoots will be a mass of blossom-buds, without a terminal shoot or leaf-bud; and

although they may be cut out, and yet leave more blossoms than the tree can carry on to a fruiting state, it is as well to have most of the spurs with a terminal shoot or leaf-bud. If bush-trees are in very large pots, or planted in the borders of a large house, and it is desired to have them increase more rapidly in size than pinching to three leaves will lead to, the pinching should be at the sixth or eighth leaf, leaving five or seven in every operation instead of three. This is applicable to all kinds of fruit trees under summer pinching, when large trees are wished for. My trees, under this successant pinching, are sturdy bushes, full of blossom-buds, and quite pictures of robust health, and the fruit they bear is always large and high-colored, owing to its full exposure to the sun. In March it will be good practice to thin out some of the numerous blooming spurs and clusters of blossom-buds, with a sharp penknife, otherwise the trees will be too much crowded with blossoms. This thinning out may also often be done in summer with advantage; for, if the trees grow very luxuriantly, the young shoots become crowded, and the thick mass of leaves shades the fruit too much; in such cases the young shoots may be thinned out in the month of July much to the advantage of the tree, this simple and charming method of pruning, only occurring to me in 1858, was fully carried out in the summer of 1859. I am quite at a loss to account for its not having been discovered earlier. As far as regards myself, I think it was the fear of inducing, by incessant pinching, too many young shoots to break out that deterred me from practising it. Reasoning from theory only, I imagined it to be impossible for young shoots made in August to ripen, forgetting the warm autumnal atmosphere of the orchard house. I do not hesitate to assert that this simple step forward of pruning by incessant summer pinching is one of the most successful advances that have ever been made in fruit-tree culture under glass. I may add, that if by any neglect the pinching of the shoots in June and July has not been attended to, so that the trees have made shoots of from 2 to 3 feet in length, these may be shortened with a sharp knife to ten or twelve leaves. The bud at the end will then form itself into a leaf-bud, and even make some small growth, while all the buds below will remain fruit-buds, and quite dormant till spring. I tried this experiment in August 1861. No anxiety need now be felt even by the lady orchard-house cultivator—no advice need be asked of the too-often-unwilling-to-give-it-gardener. Thinning in early spring those pretty clusters of blossoms with a penknife (for they are always too numerous, and at least half of them may be cut out), and at the same time shortening shoots that are irregular; and in summer pinching off the ends of the young shoots, always fragrant, so as to give symmetry to the tree and make it pleasant to look on, are all agreeable operations. The climate of the orchard house will do all the rest, and a peach tree in a pot will bear fruit even under very adverse pruning circumstances, much more under a lady's loving yet pinching care. All that seems to be required is to make the tree symmetrical, and prevent its bearing too bountifully; for it must be borne in mind that fruit from a tree overloaded, whether under glass or in the open air, is never of fine flavor. *Peaches, pears, plums, apples, and indeed all descriptions of fruit, suffer in flavor to an extent scarcely thought of, if the tree be allowed to bear too many.* It is better to have one dozen of peaches large, and of fine flavor, than two dozen small and inferior; besides this, a tree suffered to bear too large a crop will be sure to fail the following season. There are two methods of cultivating these fruits in orchard houses both equally favorable to their well-doing; one is to cultivate the trees in pots, the other to plant them in the borders of the houses. With the large houses, the most eligible form of tree to plant in pots is the pyramidal; this most interesting form succeeds better in pots than when planted in the borders; the roots being confined, the shoots are not so gross as those on trees planted in the ground, the sap does not rush to the top so rapidly, leaving the lower branches in a weakly state; in fact, it seems more regularly distributed, so that for many years a pyramidal peach or nectarine tree, in a pot from 15 to 18 inches in diameter, will gradually increase in beauty, and by the simple operation of pinching all the young shoots formed during the summer to two, three, or four leaves, a fruitful and beautiful pyramid, 10 feet or more in height may be formed. Such trees, placed among others planted in the borders, are most ornamental, showing, as they will do if attended, to, perfect cultivation. The health and fertility of such trees is kept up by giving them every season