

Soils and Crops

Address communications to Agronomist, 75 Adelaide St. West, Toronto

AIR YOUR POTATOES.

Thousands of bushels of potatoes are lost to Ontario farmers every year, due to two diseases which occur frequently and are preventable with proper precautions.

These diseases are chilling injury, or "field frost," as it is sometimes called, and breakdown. The first of these two diseases is caused by slight chilling of the potatoes after they are dug from the ground or are in storage or transit. Potatoes subjected for periods as small as three or four hours at temperatures near the freezing point of water, thirty-two degrees, are affected. Often, the tubers are normal to all external appearances, but when cut open show brown or grayish-black areas in the flesh of the stem end, about an eighth of an inch beneath the skin, the flesh being somewhat withered at these places. Others show a blackening in the interior part of the flesh, which may extend for a considerable distance into the tuber from the stem end. When cooked, such tubers, instead of being white and mealy, are blackened and soggy, much to the chagrin of the housewife.

Breakdown of potatoes may be of two types—the one a superficial dying of areas of the skin, and the second a deep internal discoloration of the flesh. The surface breakdown of potato tubers is an injury which makes its appearance after the tubers have been placed in storage. The first symptoms are observed by the grower three or four months after the date the potatoes were stored, when some tubers in the bins show on their surfaces slightly sunken, round or irregularly-shaped spots, varying in size from one-sixteenth to three-fourths of an inch in diameter. The borders of the spots have a blueish or gun-metal hue. Upon cutting these sunken spots with a knife, it is found that they are only skin, no rotting has progressed into the brown layer of denticles beneath the skin. No rotting has progressed into the tuber. This surface breakdown is the so-called "Buttonrot" of the trade, but it is not a true rot of the tuber.

The pitting of the tubers becomes more pronounced as the season advances, and with the coming of warm weather in the spring the most severe symptoms of the disease are seen. Many tubers are found to be soft and mushy, and others, when cut open, show black centers, a condition known as "blackheart." Blackheart often occurs in refrigerator car shipments or in shipments where tubers cause over-heating of the tubers. It is common with pitted potatoes when the spring weather is excessively warm.

The enormous loss caused by breakdown each year can be prevented by giving more attention to ventilation in the construction of new potato storage houses or by remedying the defects of those already constructed. The following recommendations are made:

1. Provide each potato cellar or storage house with inlets for fresh air and outlets for foul air.
2. Provide false floors and walls for the bins.
3. Provide air spaces between bins.
4. Never store potatoes in piles more than five feet deep without making some provision for air to get to the centre of the pile.

SOWING SEEDS IN HOTBEDS.

When using the manure-heated hot-

bed for growing the early plants, no seed should be sown for several days after the manure has been placed in the bed. If a good grade of manure has been used the bed will heat very violently at first and it is not safe to sow seeds in the soil until this initial heating is over. It is a good plan to plunge a thermometer through the soil into the manure and as soon as the temperature has fallen to about eighty or eighty-five degrees Fahrenheit the bed is ready to plant.

The soil of the bed should be loosened and made as nearly level as possible. For growing lettuce or radishes to maturity the seed should be planted directly in the soil of the bed. They should be sown rather thinly in rows about four to six inches apart. This will allow of thinning the seedlings and stirring the soil when necessary.

If the plants are to be grown for early transplanting, they may be started in the soil of the hotbed, but it is better to start them in shallow boxes or flats. Flats slightly less than twelve inches wide and eighteen inches long outside measure, and about two and one-half inches deep, will be found convenient to handle and they will fit into the frames without leaving any waste space. When the flats are used, the seedlings can be taken to a warm place when they are ready for shifting and the work can be done more easily than when bending over the frame of the bed. The flats can also be shifted from one part of the frame to another and whenever necessary they can easily be transferred to cold frames where the plants are to be hardened in preparation for transplanting to the garden or field.

Some kinds of plants, such as melons and cucumbers, do not transplant readily, but if the seeds are planted in soil placed in some receptacle so that the plants can be transferred to the garden without disturbing the roots, much earlier crops can be secured. Commercial gardeners use special dirt bands extensively for this purpose. Old berry boxes, clay or paper pots, squares of inverted soda, or tin cans with the tops and bottoms melted off are also used.

A good soil for starting seeds and plants is made by composting sods and stable manure, but if a compost heap is not available, a satisfactory soil may be made by mixing together one part of well-rotted manure, two parts of good garden loam or rotted sods, and one part sand. These must be thoroughly mixed together by shoveling, after which the soil should be sifted through a screen before placing it in the flats or bands in which the seeds are to be sown.

The date of starting seeds in the hot-bed is governed by the date that the plants can be set in the open ground. Cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce are cool season crops and the plants may be set out as early in the season as the soil can be worked in good condition, but it is not safe to set out tomatoes, melons and other warm season crops until the soil is warm and all danger of frost is over.

As a rule, cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce may be started about six weeks before the plants will be needed for setting in the garden or field; tomatoes and peppers eight weeks; egg plant, celery and onions about ten weeks; melons and cucumbers, four to six weeks.

Save the Woodlot.

It is a shame the way some farmers neglect their woodlots. Trees that blow down during storms are allowed to remain as they fall, to rot and decay. Large heaps of brush are allowed to accumulate and litter the woods, preventing the growth of new trees and harboring rodents that do serious damage to orchards and crops that are nearby. These brush piles are first-class places for forest fires to start.

Fallen trees in a woodlot should immediately be cut up and disposed of. The stumps of these trees should be blasted out and hauled away. Dead trees that are standing should be cut, as they are of no good to the forest, but slow the growth of the little trees by shutting out the sunlight, the food of the little trees.

In Germany, whenever a tree is cut or destroyed, two small trees must be planted to preserve the forests. This is part of the German law. We wish a similar law was in force in Canada.

If every woodlot would be kept in the condition I have just stated there would be plenty of timber for the coming generation. But as things are being kept now, in another century there will be no forests to speak of.

To Protect Trees from Rabbits.

To prevent rabbits from chewing trees, rub the bodies of the trees, as high as necessary, with smoked pork rind. This is an old German remedy which is much more valuable at present than the German mark.

The farmer is going forward, even if only "on low." It will be but a short time when he can probably "hit on high" again.

How to Start Beekeeping.

Bees can be kept profitably almost anywhere in Canada and each year the number of beekeepers gradually increases. Anyone can keep bees, but it is advisable that persons having an unusually high nervous temperament and those who are readily affected by the poison of bee stings should not attempt it. The returns from beekeeping are as certain as those in any other business and I do not think there is any other branch of agriculture that yields as high returns for the small amount of capital invested or the time required.

Anyone intending to start beekeeping must have a fair knowledge of bee behaviour and what the bees require. A thorough knowledge of modern methods is not necessary to make a start; indeed, this knowledge can only come through years of practical experience. The wider one's experience the better beekeeper one becomes. It is essential to be able to apply knowledge promptly and to do the right thing at the right time. The business of beekeeping is one of details and one that requires specialists. To gain the knowledge required, it is advisable for the prospective beekeeper to spend at least one season with a good beekeeper if at all possible. If this cannot be done much may be learned by attending short courses in beekeeping at any of the colleges, reading good books on the subject or visiting neighboring bee yards as often as possible.

When ready to take up the business the first consideration is one of location. A good location is one that will produce a fairly continuous supply of pollen and nectar from early spring until fall, with at least one source that can be depended upon for a heavy crop. Transportation, avoidance of overcrowding, and shelter from winds are other factors to bear in mind when choosing a place for the apiary. Locality will also determine the system of management, the equipment used and kind of honey produced.

Whenever possible the beginner should purchase one or two colonies of Italian bees with tested queens in his own vicinity. These bees are in modern hives. The hive in common use is the ten-frame Langstroth, although some beekeepers now prefer a larger hive carrying twelve frames, or the ten-frame Jumbo, which is a deeper hive.

Bees can also be bought in one, two or three-pound combs, packages, or if obtained early enough in the season are often equal to overwintered colonies. One should make the mistake of purchasing package bees until he has hives and other accessories in readiness.

In addition to the colonies of bees a supply of supers is necessary for the storage of the crop, the equivalent of three deep supers being allowed for each colony. Queen excluders, bee-escapes, smoker and a veil are also necessary. If increase is desired a few complete hives should be on hand for this purpose. There are several manufacturers of bee supplies that send out catalogues on application and by studying these the beginner should have no trouble in choosing the supplies he might require. It must be borne in mind, however, that the equipment purchased should be modern and suitable for the purpose it is intended for; also to keep it standard. The importance of a small beginning with as little expense as possible cannot be too strongly urged. Unless he has had some experience with bees, do not be tempted to purchase a large number of colonies, even though they are offered at a bargain.

It is discouraging to invest a large sum of money in an apiary and then to lose most of the bees during the first winter through lack of experience.

Fall Wheat Acreage.

According to official figures from Ottawa, the area sown to fall wheat in 1923 for 1924 is considerably less than in 1922. Up to the end of October, the acreage for all Canada was 767,200 acres in 1923 compared with 877,500 acres in 1922, a decrease of 110,300 acres. In Ontario, the area sown is 702,100 acres compared with 763,100 acres in 1922, a decrease of 61,000 acres. In Alberta, it is estimated that the acreage sown is 49,500 compared with 99,000 acres in 1922, a decrease of fifty per cent. In British Columbia, 15,600 acres were sown in 1923, being 200 acres more than in 1922.

The man who cultivates a taste for reading will undoubtedly use better taste in cultivating his fields.

Ontario Three-Month Schools

BY L. STEVENSON, B.S.A., SUPERVISING DIRECTOR.

The three-month schools in elementary agriculture and domestic science for the rural young people of Ontario have this winter been in session for twelve. In 1921-22, when they were just organized, four such courses were held, and in the winter of 1922-23, on account of popular demand, the number was increased to eight. The courses are conducted by the Agricultural Representative, assisted by resident teachers and visiting specialists. They are being held this year at the following places:

Barrie (Simcoe, North and South); Lindsay (Victoria); Keene (Peterboro); Kingston (Frontenac); Brimston (Dundas); Renfrew (Renfrew);

Absorbents in the Stable.

Approximately one-third of the excrement voided by animals is liquid. The liquid voidings of cows, according to analysis, contain in one ton 20 pounds of nitrogen and 27 pounds of potash. The solids voided contain in one ton 8 pounds of nitrogen, 2 pounds of potash and 4 pounds of phosphoric acid. Taking the price of commercial fertilizers as a basis for computation, approximately \$66 for nitrate of soda (15 per cent.), \$24 for acid phosphate (16 per cent.), and \$50 for muriate of potash (50 per cent.), per ton; the value of these elements would be 22 cents per pound for nitrogen, 7 1/2 cents for phosphoric acid, and 5 cents per pound for potash.

From the above calculation it will be seen the liquid manure is worth \$4.40 for the nitrogen, it contains and \$1.85 for the potash, a total value of \$6.25 per ton, while the solids are worth \$1.76 for the nitrogen, 10 cents for the potash and 30 cents for the phosphorus, a total value of \$2.06 per ton. It is obvious that it is very important to conserve all liquids voided by animals. This can be done in practice by using absorbents of some kind which permit the return to the land of this valuable fertilizer with as little loss as possible.

One pound each of well dried peat, thoroughly dried sawdust, and dried leaves will absorb, respectively, 5, 4, and 1 1/2 pounds of liquid. It is difficult to dry peat thoroughly under our climatic conditions and to get good dry sawdust is equally difficult. Fortunately, good dry straw, the absorbent most generally available, is also one of the best absorbents.

Tests show that one pound of straw will absorb in twenty-four hours from 2 1/4 to 2 3/4 pounds of liquid. Oat straw is found to be a slightly better absorbent than wheat straw. Oat straw, according to analysis, contains 12 pounds of nitrogen, 4 pounds of phosphorus and 24 pounds of potash per ton. If we attribute to the plant food constituents in oat straw the same value as that given to them in commercial fertilizers, we find that a ton of oat straw is worth \$2.64 for the nitrogen it contains, 30 cents for the phosphorus and \$1.20 for the potash, a total of \$4.14. Assuming that two tons of liquid manure (urine) can be conserved by using a ton of straw, the three tons so produced would have a fertilizing value of \$15.64, or \$5.21 per ton.

Our tests have shown that 1,000 pound steers kept in box stalls average 78 pounds of manure per day, including the bedding used, which was ten pounds per steer per day. That is, the voidings amounted to 68 pounds each per day. One-third of this amount, twenty-three pounds, being liquid, provision was made for its absorption. This ten pounds of straw did, satisfactorily. This amount of straw may at first thought seem to be excessive as ten pounds of straw has a considerable bulk, but it is no more than is necessary to take up all the liquid thoroughly. It is not wise to sting with bedding materials and it is doubtful if straw can be used in any other way as so good advantage.

If we desire that the waste, the comfort of the animals should be considered, though, judging by the bedding used in many stables, this feature is not given great consideration. Everything favors a more generous use of absorbents, and fortunately with a good straw crop this year, the requirement can be much better met than during the past few years. It is also wise to keep in mind that straw has a considerable value above the fertilizing elements contained, in that it eventually furnishes humus to the soil, thus greatly aiding in keeping it in good tilth, making it more resistant to drought, and much more suitable for the development of soil bacteria.

Totals of Livestock Movements.

Sales of cattle for the eleven months of the year ending November, according to Dominion Live Stock Branch returns, were 748,242 compared with 774,300 in the same period last year, and the cattle billed through numbered 157,496 compared with 194,177 in 1922. Sales of calves totalled 235,340 compared with 247,554 last year. Sales of hogs totalled 879,460 compared with 713,345 and billed through were 95,345 compared with 54,542. Sales of sheep and lambs numbered 423,593 compared with 506,420 and billed through 23,769 compared with 33,657. It will be noticed that there has been a decrease in every case last year, excepting in hogs.

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Home Education

"The Child's First School is the Family"—Froebel.

Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Talent

BY HELEN GREGG GREEN.

Dropping in at a friend's the other day, I found her sitting on the floor admiring a wooden aeroplane her small son was making.

"Isn't it splendid?" she smiled, handing it to me.

"I'm going to build big aeroplanes, and bridges, and houses, and things, when I grow up!" Buddy exclaimed.

"Indeed he is!" the mother declared. When six year old Buddy had returned to his playing his mother said, "Ever since Buddy was old enough to show any special interest along any line, I've tried to detect his natural gifts. He always loved building things. And I have encouraged this talent to the best of my ability. We have furnished him with plenty of building material. And I'm never too busy to stop, look, and admire."

"You're right," I replied, very much interested. "Plenty of talent has been left to die because of lack of interest on the part of the parent."

"I had a cousin," the mother continued, "who would have been a famous painter but for his father."

"Yes. He was always saying, 'No artist son for me. I want a regular boy.' When Joe begged to be sent to an art school, where he could express the beauty hidden away in his soul, the father refused, and packed him off to a military academy. He never accomplished anything. So— I'm trying hard not to be that kind of parent."

After I left, I thought how wise Buddy's mother is.

How much talent has been lost to the world, through the stupidity, carelessness, and thoughtlessness of parents!

So let us study our boys and girls, encouraging and developing the talents they possess.

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FLOWERS ON THE FARM

BY L. K. LONG.

Driving through the country I had occasion to stop at the home of a family that had but recently come to live on their farm. It was a fine tract of land and had been well cultivated, but had never before been a home.

The new house was modern, the barn and other farm buildings attractive looking, and the grounds were well laid out; but there were as yet no trees or shrubs—no cosy corners or enticing slopes for the children's games. It will be many a year before the place has a home-like appearance.

Only a few miles from this farm I stopped in the shade of two wide-spreading maples that stood in front of an old dilapidated farm house. In the house were stored some of the owner's farm implements and a flock of sheep wandered through its rooms at will. No longer was it used as a dwelling, the owner having bought an adjoining farm on which was a large house. "Not a very attractive picture," you are saying. But wait a minute. I saw something more.

On either side of the front door, not too close to the house, were two large syringa bushes in full bloom. Near the side door, on the almost obliterated path leading to where the ruins of the stable could be seen, was a magnificent specimen of the Persian lilac. These bushes, situated as they were, gave an air of distinction to the place, and I felt invited to walk in and look about. Upon investigating I found a fire bush, a smoke tree, roses growing in grass and weeds, great clumps of peonies and rows of poets' narcissi.

How I wished that this old house could be cleared away, that the new house I had just seen could be set down in its place, and that the barn could have been placed on the pleasant slope where were the scattered remnants of the old stable. With a little expense and some hard work, in which the children would have gladly shared, the rubbish about the trees and shrubs could have been cleared away, borders rearranged and old paths restored. Within a year or two it could have been made into a neat, attractive and altogether delightful home place for a happy family. Trees, shrubs and flowers give an air of real distinction to a farm home.

No farmer should be content without a fair amount of standard shrubs, vines and bushes. They are neither expensive nor difficult to grow. Lilacs of different colors, syringas and especially the large flowering fragrant sorts, forsythias, roses, honeysuckle, trumpet vine, clematis, wisteria, morning-glory and moon flowers are among the very satisfactory kinds.

"I take a good look at the morning glories as I make my first trip to the barn, and feel better all day," says one farmer.

Peonies are wonderfully satisfying, so luscious in their freshness. They prosper for years in the same situation. Bleeding heart, lemon lily, day lily, and June lily give an abundance of bloom throughout a long season and do not require frequent changing.

Tulips, narcissi and hyacinths are good bloomers and increase rapidly. With iris one can spend considerable money, but at a small outlay one may be made with very lovely kinds.

If nasturtiums, verbenas and petunias are planted so as to fill considerable space, they will not only cheer the farm family, but will also cheer every passer-by with their riot of color.

It is a safe guess that the farmstead which is abundantly supplied with attractive flowers will have plenty of customers to patronize its wayside market for orchard, garden, poultry and dairy products.

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