

Issued
Each Week

FARM AND DAIRY & RURAL HOME

Only \$1.00
a Year

Vol. XXXII.

FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 6, 1913.

No. 11

HOW TO MAKE NEGLECTED ORCHARDS PRODUCE 85 PER CENT. OF No. 1 FRUIT

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Why do we Produce such a Large Proportion of Inferior Fruit? The Pruning Methods that were used in Restoring many Neglected Orchards to Profitable Productiveness: Described by the Man who Did It.

ARE we producing even creditably good fruit in Ontario? From what I have been told by the managers of apple associations and judging from the orchards I have seen, I believe that the average apple pack of Ontario will not grade better than 50 per cent. No. 1. Some good authorities say that 40 per cent. is nearer the mark. This enormous per cent. of No. 2 apples is largely due to neglected pruning. And what are the possibilities? Six orchards used for demonstration purposes in Simcoe county by the Ontario Department of Agriculture three years ago graded 85 per cent. No. 1. These orchards were sadly neglected, could not be more in need of pruning, and had never been sprayed.

The aim of all apple growers should be to grow the best. Good apples are profitable—I mean apples of high quality. Red apples should be as nearly red all over as it is possible to make them. Apples grown among dense foliage where the sun cannot reach them are usually poor in color and not tempting in appearance. It is often said "Ontario can grow the best apples in the world," but it may be as truthfully said that Ontario is growing a great number of very poor ones. The highest priced apples selling in Toronto are not grown in Canada, but come from the Western States. A small town in Eastern Ontario is also importing apples from the States. A storekeeper of this town said that some of his customers wished something better than that with which Ontario growers were supplying the home market.

ORCHARDS WITH POSSIBILITIES

There are a great many neglected orchards which, if they were properly pruned, sprayed, and cultivated, would produce paying crops. As a matter of fact, the finest Spy apples at the Ontario Horticultural Show in 1911 were grown on old trees carefully reclaimed. The following directions indicate the methods followed in producing 85 per cent. No. 1 fruit in the Georgian Bay District.

First, we removed all dead wood, high limbs were cut back, and cross branches cut out. This pruning induced an abundant growth of suckers upon the large limbs. Those most favorably situated were selected and cut back to form new fruit-bearing wood lower down on the trees and at points where no fruit buds had previously grown. In this way the long

bare limbs were made in time just as fruitful as the top and outside branches. In reclaiming these old orchards in case they were in sod, we plowed in the spring after pruning. We plowed as shallow a sod as could be turned. Where tillage has been neglected the roots feed near to the surface and deep plowing the first year will destroy a great many of these feeders.

And now for the farmer who has an old orchard to be reclaimed. A thorough overhauling of the orchard should be undertaken. All rough bark should be scraped off because it covers many insects that are hard to reach with spray materials. A hoe is a convenient tool with

which to scrape. An ordinary handle will reach the higher limbs. It is not often necessary to scrape higher than a man can reach with an ordinary hoe, standing on the ground. A hoe with a short handle is convenient for the trunk and lower branches. If the centre of the hoe is filed out to make a circular edge it will do better work and not slip so often. Do not scrape deep enough to expose the live yellow bark.

Pruning now is not done in the way many did it 20 years ago. Low-headed trees are now considered most profitable; they are easier to prune, spray, and pick. But if we have high headed trees we can but make the best of it. Again, some old orchards have the main branches destitute of bearing wood 12 or 15 feet from the ground. After the trees have been pruned, as already described, part of the top branches should be cut off, always cutting back to a lateral. Cutting back the head has a tendency to force out sprouts on the bare lower branches. This high wood is a dead loss. There are some trees so high that it is next to impossible to spray or pick. There is no profit in growing apples that cannot be sprayed, and apples shaken off are almost without value. Twenty-five feet is a high tree, rather lower is better. There are many trees in Ontario 45 feet high. Such high trees should not be lowered to 25 feet in one season. That would be a terrible shock to the tree, and it might die.

PLAN FIRST—THEN ACT

In pruning, it really takes more time to determine what to cut off than to do the cutting. This suggestion to some may look like a waste of time, but it is not really so. Look carefully round a tree and determine where there is a likely place to head back to. About five or six feet in one season would be lowering a tree very fast. The pruner should make up his mind when on the ground where he means to cut to, but after looking at the top from the tree he may find it necessary to cut slightly higher or lower because of the lateral branches not being exactly as he thought they were when on the ground.

I would first cut back the centre, then the outer branches to laterals corresponding in height to the centre. The centre of the tree should be highest, gradually sloping lower to the outer branches. In every case cut back to a lateral. The following season those trees still high should be lowered more, to the next lateral, several feet lower, and so on, every season or every other year until the tree is at desired height.

DON'T LET TREES CROWD

When trees are so closely planted



One of Four Important Factors in Orchard Improvement Work

Spraying, pruning, cultivating and fertilizing, all of these four factors must receive attention if we would derive the greatest profit from our bearing orchards. Mr. Brimmingcomb, Huron Co., Ont., may be here seen performing the first and most important of these operations with an up-to-date power sprayer. In the article adjoining, Mr. W. F. Kidd deals with the second orchard improvement factor, pruning, and in the following page the remaining two factors, cultivating and fertilizing, are also dealt with. The neglect of any one factor is bound to result in reduced profits.