

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (HORTICULTURAL BRANCH).

THE TOP-WORKING OF FRUIT-TREES.

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MANY orchards in British Columbia, as in other sections of the Pacific North-west, contain trees which are not productive. This condition is usually due to neglect on the part of the owners, the planting of unsuitable varieties, or to old age. Where land is as valuable as it is in the fruit-growing sections it does not pay to have these "boarders" in the orchard. Every tree should be made to produce returns. Trees which for some reason are not productive, or produce fruit for which there is no demand, should be removed and replaced by other trees, or, if conditions justify, top-worked to a desirable variety. Top-working is a quick way of making a tree productive. While the majority of fruit-trees do not produce their first commercial crop until the seventh year, a top-worked tree should, under favourable conditions, bear a fair crop the fourth year after being worked over.

Before attempting to top-work an orchard or a number of trees the owner should know why they have failed. If their failure is due to an unsuitable location or a poor soil, they should be removed and the land used for other purposes. If the soil is satisfactory or can be made so, and the trees are merely of the wrong variety and have good root systems, are not stunted, decayed, badly sun-scalded on the trunk, or too high-headed, the chances are favourable for top-working. However, it must be remembered that top-working is not a panacea for all the ills of a neglected or otherwise unprofitable orchard, and cultivation, spraying, and pruning must be practised along with top-working to assist the trees to regain their normal vigour. The treatment necessary for top-worked trees is similar to that given to a young orchard.

TIME FOR TOP-WORKING.

Top-working is done in the spring of the year. No exact date can be set which will apply for all sections, but as a rule it may be done between the middle of March and the middle of April in the inland sections and a little earlier on the Coast. Good results may be obtained any time after the buds begin to swell and before they burst, which usually gives from four to six weeks for the work. If the scions are set too early they are in danger of drying out before growth starts, and if set too late they may form leaves which will exhaust the food-supply before the cambium layers unite. However, it is better to be a little late than too early.