

# The Agriculturist.

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## FLAX; ITS CULTIVATION AND MANAGEMENT. NO. I.

Having been favoured with several of the best treatises on the cultivation and management of the Flax-plant, through the kindness of FREDERICK WIDDER, Esq., of this City, *Commissioner of the Canada Company*, we propose compiling therefrom a series of papers on this subject, which from various causes is beginning to excite more than ordinary attention in different sections of the Province. As the time for sowing will speedily arrive, we shall commence with some remarks on the climate and kinds of soil best adapted to this crop, the preparation of the land, and the time and method of sowing.

The climate of Western Canada is no doubt sufficiently humid for the successful growth of Flax, which has been raised in small quantities in different districts for a number of years; the produce having been used for domestic purposes. Our position may not be equal to regions possessing an insular character—such as the British Islands, for example; but we should think it as good as most of the flax-growing countries of continental Europe, where severe droughts frequently occur in the spring, after the plant has reached a height of two or three inches; a circumstance very unfavourable to its subsequent progress. The growth of Flax may be said, indeed, to have a very wide range over the surface of the globe. “It flourishes in the light soil of Flanders, in the deep alluvial deposits of Holland, in the limestone and peaty soils of Ireland, and on almost, if not on every variety of land in England. Good crops have been produced on reclaimed bog, and it has grown on the Wicklow mountains a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and flourished even at that elevation on cold granitic moory soil, which in its natural state produced nothing but heath. Like grain and other crops, flax may show a preference for other soils and situations, but it will flourish and attain maturity in all, if proper care is bestowed on its cultivation.” (*Nicholls.*)

The best soils for flax are deep rich loams, resting on a clay subsoil. It is of much importance that the land should be naturally sound and dry, or made so by draining; and deep cultivation is, in all cases, to be strongly recommended,

since the roots will frequently descend to a depth equal to the length of the plant above ground;—a condition deserving much attention by the cultivator, particularly in countries (among which Canada must, to some extent, be included,) that are liable to severe droughts in spring and summer. It would be a good practice, especially on heavy lands, to plough deeply in the fall, leaving the ground in ridges, sufficiently furrowed to allow the water, after the melting of the snow in spring, to find a ready exit. Care should be taken not to work the land in the spring till it is quite sound and dry;—a precaution indeed that may be said to apply to cultivation in general, as the mechanical texture of the soil is often seriously injured for one or more seasons by the treading of horses when in a wet state; thereby causing it to consolidate to an injurious extent, preventing the free penetration of the roots of the growing plant in their search for food, and excluding the healthy action of air, warmth and moisture. Experienced flax-growers, however, find that a very loose soil is not favourable, as is the case with wheat, beans, clover, &c., all which require a soil moderately adhesive.

Rich pasture lands are those best adapted to the growth of flax. But if this crop is too frequently repeated, the very richest lands will soon cease to yield a profitable return, under the ordinary system of cultivation. Flax is no more an exhauster of the soil, *per se*, than cultivated cereals in general;—but when it is allowed to ripen its seed, which, with the fibres wholly removed from the land, and nothing in the shape of manure returned,—a practice that has too commonly been pursued,—there can be no doubt that flax culture, in such circumstances, rapidly exhausts the land. But so it is with all kinds of crops;—particularly the grain bearing plants. From the chemical composition of flax,—particularly the seed, it must draw largely on the soil for *phosphates*;—which, however, can be readily restored by the manure of animals fed on the refuse of the seed after the oil has been expressed; and all those portions of the plant not used by the manufacturer, ought to be converted into manure and returned to the land, instead of being, as has been too commonly the case, absolutely wasted. Even the water in which flax is steeped, possesses considerable manuring qualities, and will pay for economising, and applying to the land. In Belgium, where flax-culture is the most successfuly carried out, liquid manure, properly