

Soils and Crops

This Department is for the use of our farm readers who want the advice of an expert on any question regarding soil, seed, crops, etc. If your question is of sufficient general interest, it will be answered through this column. If stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed with your letter, a complete answer will be mailed to you. Address: Agronomist, care of Wilson Publishing Co., Ltd., 72 Adelaide St. W., Toronto.

GIVING NEW-GROUND POTATOES THE RIGHT START.

"Who knows best how to raise a good crop of potatoes on new ground?" I have raised a great many crops of potatoes and I invariably plant them on my new land. I have used many different methods and know that I have arrived at a very close approach to perfection in this field; therefore, I respectfully offer what follows in my answer to the question at the head of this paragraph.

It is hard to do a good job of plowing on new ground because it is usually rough and contains a more or less bounteous crop of roots and snags; but anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well; I always take some pains and do as good a job as possible.

Preparing the Land

Having the ground plowed, the next task is the harrowing; on this point I want to place special emphasis, because many a crop is doomed to failure, or diminutive returns, because the seed bed was not properly prepared.

In the case of a heavy June grass sod a disc is necessary to cut it up; the disc should be followed by a spring-tooth harrow to mellow the ground.

My experience has been that usually a disc was not needed on new ground, because there was more briars and roots than sod. I use a steel framed harrow with adjustable teeth and the first time over the ground I set the teeth rather light; this picks up the most of the loose roots; the second time I set them a little deeper and the last time over the ground I go corner-wise of the field, which makes the marking not easy. If the ground is not very rough three harrowings will do, but I usually go over the land five or six times; work spent in preparing the seed bed is not lost. The first time over I follow the furrows, and thus avoid turning any of them back, as would likely be the case if the harrow were dragged cross-wise.

There are usually little hummocks, made by trees up-rooting years ago, we call these "cradle knolls." To level off a cradle knoll I stop the team just at the base of it and put my harrow teeth down to the last notch, then I stand on the frame and pull through. This takes off the top of the knoll and, stopping again and raising the teeth, we go on to the next one. A few doses of this will level off the knolls and put the ground in pretty good shape.

Putting in the Seed

The next step is the planting. While the drill method works very well in old ground, I prefer planting in checks in new ground for two reasons. First, the soil can be thoroughly stirred around the hill, promoting a healthy expansion of the tuber-cluster and killing the briars and grass that would otherwise lie the rows. Second: When the crop is harvested there is no living thing in sight; the wild growths have been thoroughly subdued and the field is in excellent shape for any crop that I want to plant the following year.

As to seed: I always plant the nicest potatoes that I have, cutting the seed to two eyes and planting one piece in a hill; this is better than cutting to one eye; first, because it eliminates the possibility of having

to be used. All dirt and sweat found on the face of the collar should be cleaned off and the surface which comes into actual contact with the neck and shoulder should always be smooth and hard.

In order to prevent galls and more serious conditions, it is not enough to give careful attention to the selection of the collar. The shoulder of the horse should always be washed and given special care when the animal is at heavy work. If the selection of the collar has been properly made and all of the other things in regard to this piece of harness looked after, the care of the animal's shoulder is a simple process.

Under these conditions washing the shoulder with soap and pure water, after the harness has been removed at the end of a day's work, and thoroughly drying the parts by rubbing them with clean cloths is all that is necessary.

The colt that is being broken to work in the spring should be started in on light draft while the weather is still cool, so that his shoulders as well as the rest of his body may be toughened and put in good working condition before the hot summer weather.

Other common causes for diseased neck and shoulders on a horse where preventive measures should also be applied are implements with excessive rough weights or excessive movements in the tongue when the implement is being drawn, side draft of free-going animal hitched to a slow or lazy one, walking on a ridge or furrow that is too narrow, which may cause the animal to slip constantly or side-step, and in this way injure his shoulder. In addition to this the neck and shoulders are exposed to the usual mechanical or accidental injuries.

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Poultry

The location of the brooder is an important consideration. It should face the south, in order to receive the full benefit of the sun, for old King Sol is a great friend to newly hatched chicks. And it should be situated on a well-drained site, free from depressions which are likely to collect pools of water following rainstorms. If puddles form the chicks are almost certain to wade in them.

Strangely enough, water has a peculiar fascination for chicks, in spite to them under most circumstances. For example, following a thunderstorm, especially toward evening, a brood will scamper outdoors and commence wading in the puddle, or go trudging through the wet grass and weeds. In a few moments they are wet and bedraggled, chilled to the bone and utterly miserable. The strongest will find their way back to the brooder and dry off, but the weak ones become confused, shiver and chirp for help and quickly perish.

Until they have received their first coat of feathers, chicks cannot withstand a wetting without grave dangers, hence the attendant must lay his safety plans accordingly.

There is generally a certain percentage of the brood too stupid or too reckless to seek the shelter of the brooder at the approach of a storm. Instead, they seek some temporary shelter. If the brooder is raised above the ground they are likely to go under it. This makes a good refuge, if the spot on which the building stands is well drained. Frequently, however, the site quickly forms a puddle, in which event the chicks under the brooder are apt to fill a watery grave.

Sharp Garden Tools.

Where the garden itself is not highly esteemed, the tools will be poor as a matter of course. But even people who think a lot of their gardens are sometimes very careless about the condition of their tools.

The proverb says, "If the iron be blunt, then must he put it to the more strength." Sharp tools greatly economize strength. I find that sharp bright tools that are tight to their handles add to the enjoyment one has in his work. To have a hoe slip readily through the soil, doing a nice clean job, contributes to one's self-respect and makes him proud of the work he is doing. If the hoes, spades, weedeaters, and other tools are once put in good shape, they can be easily kept sharp by the occasional use of a file; and with an old kitchen knife the rusty places can be scraped clean so that they will soon scour smooth.

By all means, let us furnish the boys with good sharp tools and show them how they can be used to best advantage and kept in order. Nothing so depresses a boy and disgusts him with gardening and farming as to be compelled to use dull and unsuitable tools.

Since the majority of thunder showers take place toward evening it is a good plan to be on the lookout for them. If one is approaching, feed the brood a little earlier, if need be, in order to get them inside the brooder, and then confine the chicks for the night. Otherwise if the storm hangs on until dark and the chicks are scattered about the premises, they will not find their way to the brooder, or, if they do so, it will be at the expense of getting wet. Sudden rainstorms take a heavy toll of chicks each year.

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