Is Salt of any Value for the Destruction of Vermin?

The writer's knowledge of the advantage of salt for the destruction of vermin in the soil is not of recent date. In taking up the subject, a brief mention of his first knowledge of it is not inappropriate. On a fine day in March, such as is desired in that month by the farmer when he estimates "a bushel of March dust to be worth a king's ransom," a farm laborer was spreading coarse salt over a field before sowing the seed oats. The crop the previous year had been badly injured by the cut-worm—much of it killed, root and stem; and now this man, by the direction of his master, was giving the field a liberal dose of salt—two sacks to the acre. The crop then sown was not in the slightest degree injured by the cut-worm. The writer was then a mere school-boy, but he had eyes to see and a mind to treasure up such lessons as this, and for many years he knew that ground, and never again was the same remedy needed.

Since then he has, times innumerable, and in different places, in his own experience, known salt to be applied for the freeing of land from cut-worms and others, that finding their home in the soil, prey upon its products, depriving the husbandman of the expected returns for his labor. The effects produced by salt when used for this purpose are known to every one at all engaged in the garden, even on a very small scale. Brine to be used should be very much diluted, its strength, if undiluted, being fatal to vegetation. In using salt for the destruction of vermin, from five to ten bushels are sufficient, without danger of injury to the crops, or two hundred and fifty to five hundred pounds. To kill weeds four times that quantity is used. The effect is then to destroy all vegetation for a time, but in a short time the vegetation is greatly improved.

The value of salt in horticulture has been long known. Gardeners have used it to prevent earth worms in lawns, as well as to kill weeds in gravel walks; and in preparing a heap of garden mould from weeds, leaves, sods and such materials, salt is used to prevent such heaps being the nursery for grubs and worms, and to kill the weeds and increase the fertility.

Salt for agricultural purposes was highly prized by the early English farmer, but fell greatly into disuse from the increased price caused by the duty imposed upon it, first in the reign of William the Third; still, at all times, even when but little used for that purpose, it maintained its character from farmers. To use the language of Professor Johnson, "They learned that it was used to kill worms and to destroy weeds; that it cleansed fallows, increased the produce of light arable lands, and was good to sweeten grass. It was well known, too, that a single grain of salt placed upon an earth worm speedily destroyed it, and that if brine were poured upon the lawn, all the earth worms were immediately ejected from that spot."

One thing is proven by testimony that cannot be shaken, a testimony of many centuries, and confirmed by modern experience, that if a field be infested with vermin such as we have spoken of, they can be expelled by the application of salt as a dressing to the soil. We know that this remedy has been in practice for at least two thousand years. This destruction of vermin may be caused by means of a chemical change in the soil, produced by the salt. Certain elements, as, for instance, lime and salt, do, we know, produce such changes. In a case such as this article refers to, a field becomes infested with wire worms or grubs. We know it had not been so heretofore. This change proceeded from some alteration in the condition of the soil. To change again this unhealthy condition, we introduce into the soil some powerful chemical agent, as we know salt to be, and by this means restore the former healthy condition of the soil, rendering it no longer a fit residence and breeding place for those destructive pests, but rather, we are assured, being to them a deadly poison.

The objection that a top-dressing of salt—so small a quantity to the acre dressed—can have no effect in destroying vermin, is not new to us, but if a fact be above the comprehension, is it any less a fact? Are we to be led away by mere sophistry to deny everything that may to us seem inexplicable? We can arrive at but one conclusion in the matter—experience has proved irrefutably that salt is of great value for the destruction of vermin in the soil.

Care of Newly Planted Trees.

We cannot, even at the busiest season on our farms, afford to neglect the trees we have newly transplanted. They are sure to be—if taken proper care of—the most valuable adjunct to the farm. More enduring than ninety-nine per cent. of our houses, they add to the farm house an air of comfort, and to the whole farm a beauty and a pecuniary value that a mere house, however well designed and built, cannot give. The number of years that are required before the young trees are of considerable value, whether for shade, or ornament, or use, enhance that value when they are some years grown. A few months suffice to build and finish a tolerably good house, whereas a great number of years are required for trees to make a good shade. Not only should we plant liberally for shade and fruit, as well as for general purposes, but, need we add, we should take all due care of them when planted.

When lately transplanted from the nursery or woods, the first season is the most trying for them, and then they need the greatest care. If properly planted, after due care is given in their taking up and removal, the greatest labor is done; a half hour from time to time in the summer and autumn evenings, may do all that is afterwards required, but that half hour must be spared to them. The care they need is little compared to the care and labor required by many farm crops, and there is no labor for which we have so fair a prospect of a good remuneration. And, we all know, it is the putting to good account those extra half or quarter hours that often ensures success.

If the ground in which we have planted our trees be left uncultivated during the summer and autumn, the surface, at least, will be baked into a hard crust, and the tender rootlets will be unable to obtain the benefit from dew and air that are absolutely essential to their health and growth. Instead of the dark green hue of the leaf and the healthy appearance of the bark, the leaf has a yellowish tint; there is disease from some cause, a want of food, of heat, or air, or an inability to use the food, though in the soil. This should not be. Let the soil be stirred lightly with a digging fork—the best implement for the purpose—taking all care not in the least to disturb the roots, and we soon see, sometimes in twenty-four hours, a great change in the trees.

Between our newly planted fruit trees I always grow root crops, as early potatoes, carrots or turnips, and this necessitates the cultivation and manuring of the soil, so that it is always in the best condition. I can see no good grounds for the objection that some make for cropping the fruit garden. On the contrary, I have the strongest proof—an experience of years—that it is a system attended with great advantages.

Watering newly planted trees must not be neglected, but it should not be done frequently, and a little at a time, as is the practice with some. When planting, a pail of water should have been put into the hole for each tree, and when, after some time, more is needed, give not much less. Pouring water merely on the soil is apt to cause a hard crust on the surface, the very thing to be guarded against. To prevent this, if the ground be mulched with straw or grass, pour the water on the mulching, and it will trickle through to the soil beneath, and there will be no hardening of the surface. If watering what is not mulched—take a hoe with the watering pot; with the hoe remove the surface soil, then pour on the water, and having done this, replace the soil drawn away. Than this there is no better method of watering trees. By it the roots get all the benefits of the watering, and there is no forming of a crust on the surface. There is yet another method of watering—one recommended in a communication to the FARMER'S ADVOCATE. It is making holes with a dibble round the roots of each tree, or plant and filling them with water. This is recommended especially for the application of liquid manure.

Stake your trees carefully when they are planted, of such a heighth that they may not be liable to be shaken in the ground by the wind. Nothing is more apt to kill young trees than such a disturbance of the roots. To guard against it, some planters use two or three stakes to each tree, but one good stake firmly placed, and the tree braced to it in such a way as to cause no chafing of the bark, will in all ordinary cases be found sufficient.

Take off from the stems all branches that shoot out too low. Pinching them off with finger and thumb is the best way to remove them when budding out. By this means any injury to the stem will be avoided, such as might afterwards be caused by the use of the pruning knife or saw.

Is it Advisable to Sow Late Crops for Fodder?

To one who has been conversant with agriculture and agricultural produce in Britain, and who is now a farmer in this western world, of no crop does the field present so great a contrast as that of the meadows. The greater humidity of the climate of those countries that lie embosomed in the great ocean and washed by the frequent rains so lately evaporated from the thousand leagues of water, and after so short a period arrested by the trees and mountains to be forced down on the grateful soil, causes for the greater part of the year an uninterrupted growth of the finer grasses, and consequently the meadows are thickly dotted with hay-cocks, as the stubble field with the large stooks of corn. Especially is this the case in Ireland, its humidity and the fertility of its soil causing such a perpetual rich verdure as to obtain for it the name of the Emerald Isle.

A yield of hay that here would be considered exceptionally heavy, would there be considered a merely ordinary crop. Three Imperial tons (6,720 pounds) per acre on land, with ordinary cultivation, would only be called a pretty fair crop of hay on a dry upland field—a first cutting. Rich bottom meadows give twice as heavy a produce. There can be no doubt that by a more thorough system of cultivation and heavier manuring, we can secure a better meadow produce than we do, dry as our climate is generally, and subject to occasional severe droughts and spring frosts. Hence the great necessity of supplementing our hay and straw as best we can.

Our design now is not so much to speak of our grand produce of grass or of our climate, as of the policy of providing for the want of winter feed for our stock, a want caused mainly by the drought when our meadows were in most need of rain. As long as there can be any reasonable expectation of a fair return for seed and labor, we should continue