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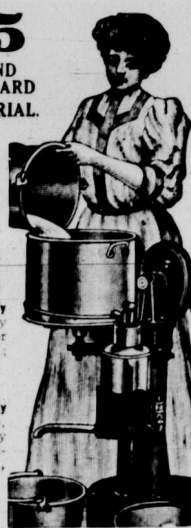
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WHEN WRITING TO ADVERTISERS
PLEASE MENTION THE GUIDE

Plain Facts about Alfalfa

"I intend to grow alfalfa this year. What varieties will do well here?"

It is evident that you realize the great value of this "King of fodder crops," which is now attracting the favorable attention of so many farmers in the Canadian West. Your question is a timely one, because success with alfalfa, under our conditions, necessitates the selection of varieties that are cold-resistant. There are some fifty varieties of alfalfa, of which three at least, have proven sufficiently hardy to do well here, viz., the Grimm, the Turkestan (if acclimated in the northwestern States), and the Baltic; possibly also one or two others, recently introduced from Northern Europe. The Grimm and Turkestan are being grown successfully here. The former is believed to be the hardiest, but the latter is also well adapted to our conditions, and is a very good hay producer. The Baltic is a splendid, hardy hybrid, the seed of which, however, is scarce and rather expensive, which will probably preclude its general introduction, for the present at least.

"How many farmers know good alfalfa seed?"

Growing alfalfa for seed has become a large and profitable industry in certain countries. This being the case, some have been attracted to engage in it whose sense of honor and business integrity has been warped by a desire to "get rich quick." Their "tricks" are various, but the card they usually play first, is the offer of cheap seed. This will be found to be either adulterated, of low vitality, or mixed with a variety of weed seeds. They may also offer seed grown in much warmer latitudes than ours, which is unscrupulously guaranteed as "hardy." The choice of good, pure and hardy seed is so vital a factor in alfalfa success, that only dealers of gilt-edged reliability and known standing should be consulted and patronized. These will "deliver the goods," true to type and variety, and the purchaser will receive that for which he pays. The writer wishes it understood that he has no interest whatever in any seed concern, neither has he any seed to sell, his sole purpose being to advise and serve prospective growers.

Test the Seed

"Where may alfalfa seed be tested?"

Procure a sample of the seed you contemplate purchasing and send it to one of our Government Seed Testing Laboratories, and receive a certificate of germination and purity before placing your order for the seed. A sample of alfalfa seed may appear to be very beautiful, even when placed under the microscope, but may still be of low vitality. The viability of seed can only be determined by test. If first-class, its germination should be at least 95 per cent. It is important also that it be clean and free from weed seeds, especially dodder, which is fatal to alfalfa. Quality should be the paramount consideration, and "bargain-counter" buying of alfalfa seed will prove a costly error. The production of high grade alfalfa seed requires care, skill and good judgment, and only such should the alfalfa grower use. Experimenting with others is certain to result in disappointment and failure.

"Will alfalfa grow on my farm?"

Yes, if yours is a well drained soil, fairly rich and fertile. The water level should be at least five feet below the surface. (This can be determined by digging a trench about five feet deep. If water collects at the bottom continually, the drainage is insufficient). Alfalfa thrives on a variety of soils, but "balks" on those that are water-logged, sour or cold. Its marvellous root system is a deep feeder and good pulverizer, reclaiming hitherto unreached minerals or plant foods from the subsoil, bringing them nearer the surface for the use of shallower-rooted crops later. The little bacteria which live in the alfalfa roots, enrich the soil by absorbing nitrogen from the atmosphere, which is a valuable fertilizer.

"What soils are unsuited to alfalfa?"

Thin soils which rest upon heavy beds

of gravel, hard pan, stiff gumbo or ledges of rock. A black or chocolate colored loam, rich in vegetable matter, and slightly mixed with sand, is well suited to alfalfa. The subsoil should be clay, sufficiently porous to permit the alfalfa roots to penetrate it readily.

A slight mixture of gravel in the subsoil is not objectionable.

"Would alfalfa do well on level land?"

A sloping or gently rolling field is better, because level land is likely to become water covered at times, drowning the bacterial life, which is so essential to alfalfa. While alfalfa requires much water (about 450 tons to produce one ton of hay), standing water is fatal to it. Districts having a rainfall of from fifteen to twenty inches, will, other conditions being favorable, produce two good crops of alfalfa each season. Growing the plant for seed, where the annual precipitation is less than fifteen inches, is receiving experimental attention, and gives promise of success.

Gophers Like It

"Are gophers troublesome to alfalfa?"

If numerous, they will probably harvest the first crop of alfalfa before it is three inches high, and do the job so thoroughly that the field will then have the appearance it had before seeding. This farm pest should be exterminated in early spring.

"Can a thrifty stand of alfalfa be secured on spring plowed land?"

Yes, provided the land has been under cultivation at least three years, and is fairly free from weeds. It should be plowed to a depth of eight inches, and be firmed by packing immediately thereafter, followed by thorough harrowing. This work should be done as soon as the ground is in condition to plow, and, to conserve moisture, create a mellow surface mulch, the field should be harrowed after the spring rains. A well-cultivated summerfallow, if plowed to the proper depth, is preferable to spring plowed land, as its seed-bed will be settled by spring and contain more moisture. Such a field should be aerated early by means of the disk, spring-tooth cultivator or harrow, until it is in garden condition.

"Which is better: spring or fall planting?"

In some portions of Canada and the United States, fall planting is preferred, but in the Prairie Provinces spring seeding gives better results. The advantages of spring seeding in the West are that the rains usually come about the right time for the young alfalfa, which makes strong growth thruout the entire season. Thus it will go into the winter with ten inches or a foot of stalk standing, enough to hold the snow and induce a fine vigorous growth in the spring.

"Is Alfalfa an early crop?"

The first cutting of alfalfa is earlier than clover. The alfalfa field is the first to be green in the spring, and the last to be killed by frost.

Should alfalfa fields be manured?"

Alfalfa loves rich soil—the richer the better. It may, however, not be necessary to manure deep, rich and well-tilled loam, altho a light dressing of fine, well rotted manure helps to secure thrifty alfalfa on clay, sand or gravel soils. On these its use is desirable, because it supplies needed plant food and retains moisture. It also prevents baking and cracking of clay soil, and tends to overcome drifting of those that are loose or sandy. If plowed under deep, it does not supply the aid at the time and manner suggested, altho its value will produce increased plant growth. Except in the case of blow sand, manure should be applied immediately after plowing, that it may be intermixed by the cultivation required to produce a suitable seed bed. Basic slag, composed of phosphoric acid and lime, when properly harrowed into an established field, marvellously stimulates the growth of alfalfa. As a winter protection, top dressing with barnyard manure may be commended.

(This is the second of a series of practical articles on alfalfa by J. E. Gustus, Calgary, Alta.)



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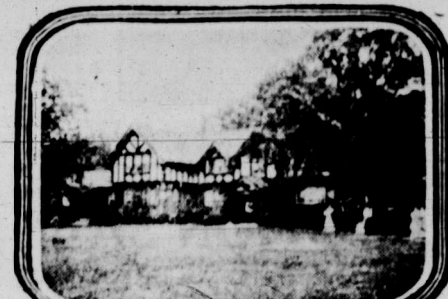
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