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Practical Principles for Profitable Peach Production*

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B EING a commercial peach grower in the Michigan fruit belt, I shall attempt to give briefly only the common principles and practices of the leading growers of our section. We attempt no fancy methods—every dollar expended and every hour's work devoted to the business is looked upon as an investment. With most of us, peach production is a "bread and butter" affair. Your own experiences with local conditions will enable you to judge just how far our methods can be followed successfully in your several orchards.

SOIL AND LOCATION

While a good loam is our ideal soil, we have good orchards on nearly all kinds of soil. We do demand, however, that all peach lands shall be well drained, both as to air and water, and, as moderate elevations tend to furnish both a good air circulation and water drainage, high or elevated lands are preferred.

PREPARATION OF THE SOIL

The ground to receive our baby trees must be well stocked in advance with suitable food to give them a vigorous start. Plowing under clover or other nitrogenous crops, before setting the trees, furnishes humus, which is especially valuable in making the ground spongy—capable of holding large quantities of water.

VARIETIES

The choice of varieties is largely a local matter. Select those which do best in your locality and which supply the demands of your market. The large plantings of peach in Georgia, Texas, etc., have caused us to discard the early varieties, especially the clings. In our section the best commercial orchards include such kinds as the Yellow St. John, Engle's Mammoth, Conklin, Fitzgerald, Elberta, Kalamazoo, New Prolific, Smock and Salway—all yellow varieties. The Champion is one of the leading white kinds, but our market calls for large, high-colored, yellow peaches. Such kinds as the Barnard, Crosby and Gold Drop are excellent in quality, but are too small, under ordinary cultivation, to be wanted by our buyers. Despite its poor quality, the size, color and ship-

ping ability of the Elberta, make it the leading market peach.

CULTIVATION

Our main object being quick and large returns, we do our utmost to force a strong, sound growth from the start by intensive cultivation *early* in the season. Corn is commonly grown the first two seasons between the trees, the loss of fertility occasioned by the feeding of the corn being partly balanced by the corn's shade to the trees from the scalding rays of the sun. The trees are headed low—not over eighteen inches from the ground—and this calls for special tools in cultivating. The extension disc harrow and the extension fine tooth drag are some of the best tools after the second

Ensures Success

I would not be without THE CANADIAN HORTICULTURIST for twice the price of subscription. I do a little work in my garden in my leisure time, and I find a great many helpful hints in its pages to ensure success in this work.—W. E. Seery, Fredericton N. B.

year, when the trees are given the whole of the ground. Cultivation must be kept up each week to save soil moisture and make more plant food available by bringing the small particles of soil in contact with the air.

PRUNING AND THINNING

Just as a fond parent corrects in his infant child any faults that may appear, so the true lover of trees, from the very first season, rubs off any buds that appear where a limb or twig is not desired, and he thus forms a correct head. A common mistake is to leave the forming of the head of the tree until it is three or four years old, when good sized limbs must be cut off, leaving large scars that are hard to heal and which often leave a weakness. Allowing unnecessary limbs to grow is also a great waste of plant energy. In fact our former methods of horticulture seem to have been based upon the principles of *forestry* rather than upon those of *fruit* production. The engineer who would attempt to run a ten horse-power engine with a five horse-power boiler would be

no more lacking in judgment than is the fruit grower who permits his tree to over-balance the root system that is called upon to sustain it. Build up that root system by continuous and intelligent feeding and then restrict the labor of the tree by severe and annual pruning and thinning. Prune so as to open the tops, so that God's free sunshine may reach all of the fruits and so paint upon their cheeks those beautiful colors, which are so eagerly sought after by the purchasers of our products.

We prune our bearing orchards during the dormant period, preferably in March, after the hardest freezes are over. Many get good results by spring or even summer pruning, and one of the most profitable orchards I have ever seen has always been pruned in the fall! However, I am inclined to attribute the fine results in the latter case to the *severity* of the pruning, rather than to the *time* when it was done. Much of the thinning can be done by severe pruning, but even after that has been done the expense of picking off the surplus peaches by hand will often be considerable. This thinning is essential and *must be done before the pit hardens*. The production of seed is a most exhaustive process and the trees must be given all possible relief, by reducing the number of fruits. Stronger and longer lived trees, larger sized fruits and doubled profits will thereby result.

DISEASES AND INSECTS

Curl leaf develops during cool, moist weather, but a thorough spraying of the dormant trees in March with a solution of two pounds of copper sulphate (blue vitriol) to fifty gallons (wine measure) of water is a sure preventive. Since we have been using lime-sulphur to destroy the San Jose scale on our trees, we find that it is equally as effective in controlling the leaf curl.

Yellows and "little peach" are deadly diseases of unknown origin. There is no known cure and the only safe course is to cut down and destroy by fire all diseased trees *as soon as discovered*. These diseases can only in that way be held in check, but "experimenting" with these diseases has cost many a grower his entire orchard.

The annual "grubbing" of the base of the trees, to destroy the borer, is also

*A synopsis of an address given at convention of Ontario Fruit Growers' Association, Toronto, last November.