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Handling Fruit Trees in the West Texas and New Mexico Section

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Shall we make the fruit interest of West Texas and New Mexico a success or failure?

There is nothing more disappointing than to see how some people are neglecting their orchards. It reminds us of a balky team pulling a heavy load nearly to the top of the hill, then slacking up and letting the wagon roll back into a ditch where they never can start it again.

Many orchards over the country have been planted and cared for almost until in bearing; then the owner neglects them and turns them over to the weeds, insects, disease and rabbits.

Nothing can be achieved without an effort, and in the case of fruit growing constant vigilance is the price of success. We find that the people of the Plains need a great deal of instruction as to how to start an orchard and how to take care of it.
The system which some people follow, which is sure to end in failure, is about like this.

They buy trees where they can get them cheapest, regardless of whether they are varieties adapted to the climate, whether they are shaped up to suit the climate or whether they are healthy or not. Then they plant their trees without thoroughly preparing the soil. They prune them high, which causes them to become top heavy, and then they become hard by dry weather and includes that about the only thing he can do is to take two horses and a turning plow and turn them under. The ground by this time has general

...on into the body of the tree, the moisture that oozes out of the cracks keeps the eggs alive till they hatch. When the worm hatches it works its way into the body of the tree, generally working down until it gets on a level with the soil. The tree is finally weakened so that the result is failure. The borer will not get into a healthy tree, where the bark is smooth and sound, as the borer worm works about the same as the screw worm fly does on stock; it has to have a wounded place to insert its eggs.

The next hardship that the tree is subjected to is the want of cultivation, many times being neglected till probably June or July. When the weeds are about full grown and have gone to seed the owner decides that it is about time that he was doing something for his orchard. He concludes that about the only thing he can do is to take two horses and a turning plow and turn them under. The ground by this time has generally become hard by dry weather and being sapped with weeds. He has to plow from six to eight inches deep, breaking the ground up in clods from the size of an egg to a man's head. This breaks up the roots of the trees at a time when the tree can least overcome the injury incident to such cultivation.

It also lets the sun and air into the soil, so that it dries out deeper than if it had not been plowed at all. We should never break an orchard over four or five inches deep close to the tree after it is as much as two or three years old. This should be done in the dormant season, so that if any roots are broken they can callous and start new roots as if they had never been dug up. Then set in holes inclining them very slightly to the southwest, with the lowest and best limbs turned to the southwest. The tree may be set little deeper in the orchard than is stood in the nursery. Great care should be taken in shaping the frame for the top of the tree, so as to grow a tree that will keep balanced against the hard southwest winds, and shade itself. The sun should never shine on the body of a fruit tree, and the shade should always be around the roots, in order that the soil might be kept moist and cool in hot dry weather.

This can be done by first pruning the northeast side of the tree anywhere from six to eight inches higher than the south and west. Have your best and lowest limbs on the southwest, about 12 or 14 inches above the ground; your second limb about two or three inches higher on the south side of the tree; your third limb two or three inches higher on the southeast; your fourth limb two or three inches higher on the northeast; your fifth limb two or three inches

...the ground which will retain the moisture.

Another damage that a great many trees are subject to is the depredation of cattle and rabbits. If any trees have the hardihood to resist all this, they finish them up by sowing rye or wheat among them in winter and sap the trees of the moisture and plant feed they should have in the spring.

When we consider a few cents in the price of a good tree, that has the possibility of being a failure after taking care of it long enough to come into bearing, the consideration is very small compared with the value of what a good tree is worth and the disappointment of a worthless tree.

Pruning the Tree

Wrong system in pruning is the cause of the destruction of many good trees. We have more sunshine and hard winds here than most anywhere else, and we must learn to prune our trees to suit the climate. This must first be done by getting trees that have been shaped up in the nursery row. We would recommend, preferably, good two or three-year-old trees which have not been pruned more than from 12 to 16 inches in the nursery.

The accompanying illustration shows the method of pruning roots so as to make a cut that will be turned down when the trees are set.

We do not advise root pruning with the view of shortening the roots, but just to cut the roots back to where they are sound and sappy, so they will callous and start new roots as if they had never been dug up. Then set in holes inclining them very slightly to the southwest, with the lowest and best limbs turned to the southwest. The tree may be set little deeper in the orchard than is stood in the nursery. Great care should be taken in shaping the frame for the top of the tree, so as to grow a tree that will keep balanced against the hard southwest winds, and shade itself. The sun should never shine on the body of a fruit tree, and the shade should always be around the roots, in order that the soil might be kept moist and cool in hot dry weather.

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Showing How the Roots Should be Pruned

higher to the northwest; your sixth limb two or three inches higher back to the southwest; your seventh limb two or three inches higher back to the south. Leave from eight to twelve stubs or limbs to start the frame or head of your trees. Then cut the body above the last limb, cutting from the north to the south, having all limbs cut back to stubs anywhere from three to five inches long. Cut from the north to the south side when there is a bud on the south. The bud at the top of the limb will continue the growth, and being on the south side, will naturally be inclined that way and resist the force of the wind better.

Never start a forked tree; neither start all your limbs in a bunch or close together, but let the body of the tree come up above all the limbs. Alternate the limbs from the southwest around the body of the tree, each time having the limb a little higher and further around the tree. If you grow a forked tree, or the limbs come out in a bunch, they will be so near of equal size that when they are loaded with fruit the weight of the fruit will pull in opposite directions to each other, and when it comes a storm your tree is liable to split and be badly damaged.

Preparation of the Soil

Now, in reference to the preparation of the soil, we would recommend that the soil be well broken the season before planting and cultivated in a light legume crop, such as peas. We would recommend that the last time the ground is broken it be broken in lands the distance apart that the trees are going to be planted and the water furrow be broken the second time, a strip of five or six feet wide as deep as two or three horses can pull a 10-inch turning plow. Then run a harrow over the soil so as to pulverize it. This will relieve the necessity of digging large holes. Plant in the water furrow, but hill up
around your trees; this can be done
hit a turning plow after trees are
set, so that the water will not stand
closer than two or three feet, but
rather have moisture soak to the
trees. Never neglect to cultivate
your orchard. It is best to shape it
so you can cultivate both ways.

There is a general opinion that
trees must be pruned some time in the
year, generally supposed to be in the
spring. This may be true and it may
not. Examine your trees, and if they
need pruning, prune them today. No
necessity to wait for any reason, but
the sooner the better. We should not
wait till a limb gets as large as a
pencil or a broom stick to cut it off.
If you have a bud or twig where
you do not want a limb, shave or rub
it off. Let that much growth go
where you want it instead of a limb
to be cut.

I would not advise pruning in hot
dry weather, as the cut will dry out
fast and not heal over as well. Nor
is it best to prune when an excessive
amount of sap is up, as the bark is
more apt to peel back, and expose
more of the wound. But any time
during the moderate growing season
will do to prune trees. A cut will
heal over better in the growing sea¬
son, as we have a high altitude and
a great deal of sunshine. Our trees
can be denser than in most any other
country. We need to prune some¬
times if the trees are so dense that
the sunshine can not get to the fruit
or there are crooked limbs that in¬
terfere or rub each other.

Most of the fruit crops grown in
this country grows on limbs from one
foot to six feet above the ground.
Most of the bearing wood is cut off
by the way some people prune. It
sometimes occurs that fruit can not
stay on the top limbs during the
windy season.

There is no necessity of making a
failure. Start right and stay right.
Start right by planting good varieties
adapted to the climate, prune right
and cultivate. I think we can grow
fruit with as little moisture as kaffir
corn, even with as little cultivation,
however, cultivation is very impor-
tant.

This does not apply to shade trees,
as they have thick bark and can
stand the hot sun.

I am often asked, "Which is the
best time to plant trees—fall or
spring?" I will say that it depends
on the season. If the soil is wet and
the air damp, fall is better, as the
soil will get packed around the roots
and the roots will callous through the
winter and start new roots in the ear¬
ly spring long before the sap rises.
Trees handled in this way will make
a better growth and stand dry weath-
er much better than trees planted
late.

Sometimes we have a dry, windy
winter, that has a tendency to dry
out the tops before the roots start.
In this case it might be better to
plant in early spring, about the last
of February.

There is a method that is safer
than either of these. Dig trees in the
fall (trees will do better dug in the
fall), cut the roots just as if you
were going to plant them, and then
heel them to about 14 inches deep,
and lean the tops to the south at an
angle of about 75 degrees. Cover the
roots with fine soil, pour in enough
water to make them moist through
the winter, and cover the tops about
two feet with dry soil. Then plant
about the 20th of February. Do not
expose the roots to dry air. While
you are planting this way, the roots
will start during the winter, and the
trees will stay in good condition. Care
must be taken to cover the roots deep
enough.

The best way to handle grapes and
berries is to plant in the fall. Plant
a little deeper than they were in the
nursery. After they are planted, cut
toff all the top within two inches of
the ground. A new top will grow
top better than the old one. In the
spring it is likely that several shoots
will start. Cut them all off the
grapes but one, and train this one on
to a trellis just as soon as possible.
Blackberry stalks should be cut down
each season just as soon as they get
through fruiting, and let the new
talks bear the next year.

Evergreens will grow better when
taken up with a ball of dirt around
the roots and a burlap sewed around
the ball, so as to keep it from crum¬
bling. Stick in holes, leave top on,
and fill around ball with loose dirt;
then water enough to settle soil, and
then hill up with loose soil. Put box
or barrel around them with both ends
out; line between barrel and ever¬
green with some kind of moist pack¬
ing—straw, moss or sacks that have
been soaked. Keep moist by sprink¬
ling of evenings, but do not keep too
wet. Keep this up until the hard, dry
winds are over in the spring. Do not
keep soil around the roots too wet,
water well about once each week.
Keep packing in barrel moist, but not
too wet.

Everblooming roses will do better
cut off within four inches of the
ground and covered with some kind
of light mulch in the winter.

In making these suggestions, I do
not mean to tell or to know all that
should be known about fruit culture,
better hope to be some help to the un-
experienced, that we may make the
West more beautiful and fruitful.