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# Laying Down of Peach Trees.

—BY—

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## LAYING DOWN OF PEACH TREES.

By WENDELL PADDOCK.

Peach growing, from a commercial standpoint in Colorado, is largely confined to the western slope of the mountains. The trees find a congenial home in many localities in several counties, consequently large areas are devoted to the cultivation of this fruit. Peaches have been extensively tested in various fruit sections east of the mountains, and in the Arkansas Valley in particular an occasional fine crop is produced. Indeed some of the best exhibits at the State Fair last fall, were grown in this section. But in four years out of five, perhaps, late spring frosts or extreme cold in winter destroy the buds. North of the Valley, peaches are rarely produced unless the trees are protected in some manner.

This experience, when success was just within reach, stimulated the growers in their efforts to overcome climatic conditions. Various devices were tried for protecting the trees during the winter and spring. These included wrapping the trees with cloth or covering with corn stalks, evergreen boughs, boards and, in fact, most anything that was at hand that might afford protection, but after several years trial, these methods were found to be of little use. In the fall of 1896, Hon. W. B. Felton, of Canon City, began experimenting with laying trees down, using two trees in this first trial. Mr. Felton was closely followed in this work by Mr. C. C. Rickard, also of Canon City, and to these two men belong the credit of working out this system of protecting trees in Colorado. And, in fact, after a rather hasty consultation of horticultural literature, I do not find any record of this method of protecting trees having been tried at an earlier date.

From this modest beginning an industry has sprung that is now assuming no mean proportions in that vicinity. A large number of fruit growers have planted peach trees varying from a few to several hundred in number. Mr. Rickard is, perhaps, still the largest grower, having now 1,000 trees in bearing.

The method of planting an orchard with the intention of laying the trees down during the winter, does not differ materially from that which is ordinarily observed. Some, however, claim that when the tree is planted the roots should be spread out on



Fig. 1. Three-year-old tree in full bloom.



Fig. 2. Mr. C. C. Rickard in his ten-year-old orchard.

either side of the tree at right angles to the direction in which it is to be laid down. Mr. Rickard pays no attention to placing the roots, claiming that in a few years the roots spread so that any evidence of training is lost. Others make a point of setting the trees close enough in the row so that when laid down the tops of one tree shall overlap the base of another. The roots are thus afforded protection as well as the tops.

The following data furnished by Mr. Rickard is given in detail as it represents the experience, not only of the largest grower, but of one who has had the longest experience in this method of growing peaches. As is true with many horticultural operations, there are different ways of doing the same thing, consequently other growers differ with these instructions in points of minor detail, but in general, the process must be the same.

Yearling trees are set in the spring and they should be laid down the first winter, repeating the process each season during the life of the tree. In this instance no attention is given to training or placing the roots. As soon as the trees have shed their leaves and the wood is well ripened, they are ready for winter quarters. This is usually in the fore part of November, in the vicinity of Canon City. The first step in the operation consists in removing the earth from a circle about four feet in diameter around the tree. When sufficient trees have been treated in this manner to make the work progress advantageously, water is turned into the hollows. After the ground has become saturated the trees are worked back and forth and the water follows the roots, loosening the soil around them so that they are pushed over in the direction that offers the least resistance. When treated in this manner the trees go over easily and with comparatively little injury to the root system. That is, providing the trees have been laid down each year. It is difficult to handle old trees in this manner that have never been laid down, and usually it will not pay to try.

After the trees are on the ground, further work should be delayed until the ground has dried sufficiently to admit of ease in walking, and in the handling of the dirt. The limbs may now be brought together with a cord, and so lessen the work of covering.

After experimenting with many kinds of coverings, burlap held in place with earth has proved the most satisfactory. The burlap is spread out over the prostrate tree top, as shown in the photographs, taking special pains to protect the blossom buds from coming in direct contact with the earth covering. A light layer of earth is now thrown over the tree and the protection is complete.

The critical time in growing peaches by this method is in the spring when growing weather begins. Close watch must be kept

to see that the blossoms do not open prematurely, or that the branch buds are not forced into tender, white growth. When the blossom buds begin to open, the covering should be loosened so as to admit light and air, but it should not all be removed. More of the covering should be removed as the weather gets warmer, but the blossoms must be exposed to the sun gradually.

Air and light are, of course, necessary for proper fertilization of the flowers, but after this process is complete and the fruit is set, all danger from the weather is considered as being over. The trees are usually raised about the middle of May at Canon City.

Raising the trees is, of course, a simple task. The ground is again watered and when wet enough the trees are raised. To be sure, trees that have been treated in this manner will not usually stand upright unsupported. Consequently they are propped up at an angle, usually two props being required to keep the wind from swaying them.

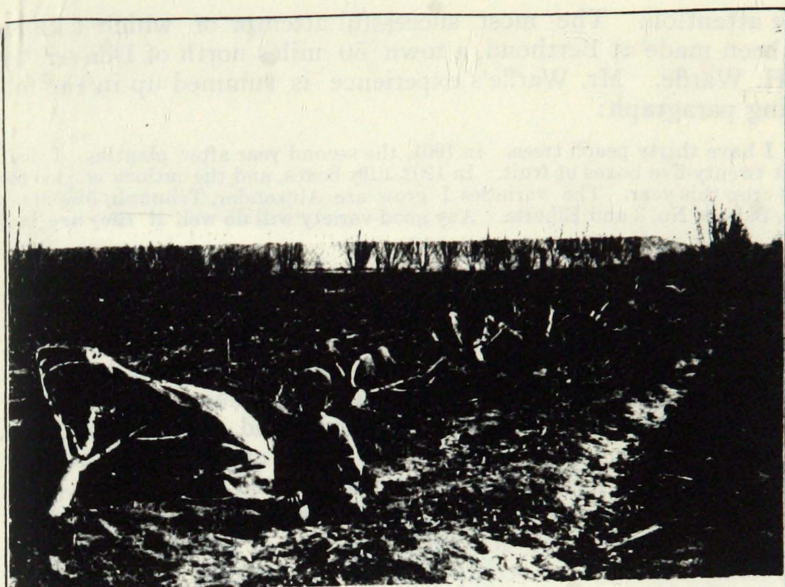
When this method of growing peaches was first presented before the State Horticultural Society by Senator Felton, it was received with not a little sarcasm by some of the members, but the practicability of laying down trees is now no longer questioned. The constantly increasing acreage of peaches at Canon City proves that it pays. The actual expense is, of course, difficult to estimate, because of the attention required in the spring. The cost of the fall work can be estimated, however, as it has been found that two men will lay down and cover twenty-five of the largest trees in a day.

This process seems to be in no way detrimental to the health of the trees, since they live as long and bear as much fruit according to the size of the top as those grown in peach sections. It is, of course, necessary to cut out the wide spreading branches and thus reduce the size of the top in order to lessen the work of covering.

The following is the record of yields as given by Mr. Rickard: In 1902, 150 ten-year-old trees and 350 nine-year-old trees produced fifteen tons of fruit, or at the rate of 60 pounds per tree. In 1901 the yield was almost the same, but in 1900, 20 tons, or 80 pounds of fruit per tree was secured.

The marketing of peaches grown on this farm has thus far been a simple matter, as most of the fruit is sold at the orchard, and at prices ranging from 3 cents a pound for culls to 10 cents for fancy stock, the average price being 6 cents a pound. So long as the fruit can be sold in this way the expense of packages is reduced to a minimum.

But how about growing peaches in this manner north of the Arkansas Valley? Can it be done? Most assuredly it can, and it is done every year, but only in a small way, and the trees are few and in such widely separated neighborhoods that they attr



Appearance of same row on April 25 and on September 20.  
Orchard of J. J. Lewis, Canon City.

little attention. The most successful attempt of which I know has been made at Berthoud, a town 50 miles north of Denver, by M. H. Warfle. Mr. Warfle's experience is summed up in the following paragraph:

I have thirty peach trees. In 1901, the second year after planting I had about twenty-five boxes of fruit. In 1902, fifty boxes, and the outlook is good for a big crop this year. The varieties I grow are Alexander, Triumph, Mountain Rose, Bakara No. 3 and Elberta. Any good variety will do well if they are laid down.

These few pages are written not with the idea of presenting anything new, but to draw attention to the fact that peaches can be grown with a certain amount of profit in most of our fruit growing regions. But the pleasure to be derived from a home supply of this luscious fruit should not be underestimated. The peaches grown at Canon City always command a higher price on the home market because they are of better quality when allowed to ripen on the tree. Those that are shipped in must be picked before fully ripe in order to stand transportation.

In many parts of the state the price of peaches is so great that many families are compelled to do without. But by using this method of laying down the trees, as worked out by the pioneer fruit growers of Canon City, the small land holder can provide his family with peaches of much better quality than can be bought on the market, and with little expense.