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THE MANAGEMENT OF PECAN ORCHARDS

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Alabama Pecan Growers' Association.

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By J. B. WIGHT, Cairo, Ga.

The man who marries an heiress only because she has money, and he who sets a pecan orchard, thinking it is a short cut to wealth, and then neglects the orchard are both moving toward Bunyan's "slough of despond." Love of nature, love of the beautiful, and love of that alchemy which, dealing with the base elements of the soil, makes out of them a food fit for the gods—these are some of the qualities possessed by him who can best grow a pecan orchard that will both please the eye and swell the bank account.

Many an orchard has reached its fifteenth birthday with that dejected, downcast look which is characteristic of the tramp who knocks at the kitchen door and begs for a meal. He who tolerates such an orchard is making a mistake somewhere. At that age trees should be things of beauty and of profit. But in reality the factor most apparent is the loss of fifteen years of valuable time. It is the old, old story. "Hind sights are better than fore." Runty trees, unsuitable land, or other factors of neglect have done their work. Why buy trees and then ignore them? Like the virtuous maiden, the pecan resents the advances of the careless, slouchy, selfish swain; but it welcomes the embrace of loving liberal hands; and to such will bring forth a bountiful harvest for every tender care bestowed.

It may be possible to build up poor lands, or to partially restore eroded hillsides so that a passably fair orchard can be

grown on them; but the job is a long and expensive one. The ideal orchard when fifteen to twenty years old should be worth a thousand dollars per acre judged by an average annual net income of 8 to 10 per cent on this amount. But he who starts with poor land will rarely reach this goal. We do not attempt to grow a race horse by beginning with a Texas mustang. The pecan grower should show equal wisdom.

Again, either laziness or some far-fetched reasoning leads to the cultural neglect of the orchard. Sometimes a runty hill of cabbage or a dwarfish stalk of corn is grown which is a stranger to the hoe and plow, and whose rootlets never enjoyed the warming embrace of a high-grade fertilizer. This is also true of pecans. A neglected orchard may bear a few scant crops; but this cannot continue. The law is inexorable that "He that soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly." I know of no tree which more substantially responds to good treatment, or which more quickly gives way under neglect than does the pecan. It will sooner or later be learned that if you want your trees to take care of you, you must first care for them. The pecan should be in its prime when it is from fifty to one hundred years old, and it will be so if properly treated; but the underfed child and the neglected pecan often die young.

And right here, gentlemen, is the key to successful pecan growing. With all the force at my command, I say **DON'T NEGLECT YOUR TREES**. The Creator may have made some short cuts to wealth, but 999 out of every 1,000 of us must travel the well beaten road; and if this is so, I want the best vehicle in which to make my way. After many years of experience and much observation I deliberately recommend pecans to him who is drawn to the soil for his living. These are some of my reasons for this:—

- (1) When once well established, they are good for one hundred years and more.

- (2) Being grown commercially in a comparatively limited area, the remainder of the world will take at remunerative prices, all that can be produced for generations to come. They are easily cultivated, handled and marketed.

- (3) They are freer from injurious insects and fungus troubles than most other fruit crops.

(4) Present prices may be cut in two, and still leave a profit for the intelligent grower. With the lowering of prices will come an almost infinitely wider market for nuts. It may surprise some to know that the present average annual crop of pecans if divided equally among every person in the United States alone, would give less than one and one-fourth ounces of shelled meats to each individual.

One of the things that will have to be dealt with more intelligently as our orchards grow older and the trees larger is the distance at which they are set. Most orchardists now set from ten to twenty trees per acre. The future may see this reduced to from five to ten trees per acre. Maximum results may be gotten by setting the larger number at first; and when they begin to crowd each other, remove every alternate diagonal row, which will leave the orchard in regular formation with half the number of trees.

But how am I to manage my pecan orchard? In reply this program is submitted, not that it is declared to be the best, (for the future may develop a better), but an orchard treated in this manner will prove to be profitable:—

(a) Until trees come into profitable bearing, they should be interplanted with some crop that is well fertilized and cultivated; and until trees are well established, don't let these crops grow too near the trees, but the space about the trees should be kept well cultivated with plow or hoe. At the end of the first year a pound or two of high grade guano (or its equivalent in stable manure) should be applied around each tree. Increase this amount each consecutive year by one to three pounds, scattering the fertilizer over ever widening areas corresponding to the expansion of the root system.

(b) When the age of profitable bearing is reached, crops must still be grown to add humus to the soil. As soon as danger of frost is over, plant the orchard to peas, velvet beans or some other crop which makes abundant foliage. Velvet beans are preferred chiefly because they furnish the most vegetable matter to be turned under, and also because they do not harbor the "stink bug," the bite of which causes "kernel spot" in the pecan.

(c) This crop should be turned under just before the nut

harvest begins, care being taken not to plow deep enough to break any large roots. It is necessary to turn the summer cover crop under at this time, otherwise many nuts will be hidden in the dense foliage, and so lost.

(d) At the time the summer cover crop is turned under, the winter cover crop of oats and rye, or a mixture of these, may be planted. Rye is likely preferable to oats in that it roots more deeply, and is less liable to be killed by winter freezes. When well established, this grain may be lightly grazed by calves or pigs without material damage. This winter cover crop should be well turned under in March just before the spring growth starts in the trees. Oats and rye thus planted in an orchard is an advantage; but to allow them to grow to maturity will decidedly damage any kind of orchard. This early spring turning is preparatory to planting the summer cover crop as outlined in paragraph (b) above.

Keep an eye on insects. An occasional brood of the fall webworm may appear in the spring. Remove these as they appear from time to time during the growing season. I find that twisting them out with a stout fishing pole is the easiest and best way to get rid of them. Burning, or spraying with an arsenical poison are other methods of destruction. All girdled twigs should be gathered and burned, as these contain the larvae of the future girdler. If in doubt as to the identity or control of any insect, send specimens to Mr. J. B. Gill, United States government entomologist, Thomasville, Ga. Like specimens of fungus troubles should be sent to Mr. J. B. Demaree, United States government plant pathologist, Thomasville, Ga.

Anything short of the best in pecan culture is not to be considered. An orchard should be a source of pleasure as well as of profit. A pecan tree eight feet or more in circumference with a spread of top of eighty feet and annually producing from two hundred to six hundred pounds of nuts is a "thing of beauty and a joy forever." Such a tree can be grown by the careful horticulturist. An orchard yielding an average net income of \$100.00 and more per acre is no visionary dream, for many of you have seen such, and some of you are now growing them.

Pecan orcharding in the greater part of the cotton belt of the South can be made a marked success by him who mixes brains with his soil. The careless and indifferent had better grow cotton, and corn and razor-back hogs.