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HOOD RIVER ALLEY ANJOU CULTURE

(By Gordon B. Brown)

Studies have been made during the past five years to measure the influence of pruning and fertilizing in a d'Anjou orchard now 18 years old. Unfortunately the trees were set only 20 feet apart on the hexagonal system. During the last six or seven years trouble has been experienced in over-crowding and excessive shading. When the present owners assumed charge of this tract in 1918 an unproductive condition was generally true. The orchard had been subjected to excessive clean cultivation and lack of pruning over a long period. There was every evidence of nitrogen starvation. In one portion of the orchard known as the "Bartlett block" tree crowding was less acute and yields generally better than elsewhere on account of the fact that in this mixed planting the Bartlett trees were comparatively small, thus permitting better development of the d'Anjou. Attention is here called to three very large, unpruned d'Anjous in this portion of the orchard, hereafter referred to as an unpruned check.

Applications of three pounds of sodium nitrate per tree were made in the spring of 1918 and 1919 in certain portions of this orchard to induce better tree growth and set of fruit. Growing seasons were noticeably improved but increases in yields were only moderate. Reference is here made to a fertilizer experiment started in what is known as the alfalfa block in the spring of 1920. At that time alfalfa was needed and has since been permitted to occupy the ground, being thoroughly disced each spring.

During early spring, 1922, extremely heavy pruning was employed. This was in the nature of "bar pruning" the tops being thinned out and headed back to laterals. Reference to the 1922 column indicates that the job "worked." Trees receiving nitrogen whether alone or in combination have a clear cut loss in the matter of yields. Even the check trees responded with an average of 9.58 boxes each. On the other hand there is nothing to indicate any merit in applications of potash or phosphoric acid. Plots receiving such fertilizers did not respond similarly to that of unfertilized trees. This fact is consistent with similar fertilizer tests with tree fruits elsewhere at Hood River. Trees in this portion of the orchard received only light thinning out in 1923 and 1924.

Several changes were made in the original fertilizer test in 1923 and 1924. Potash was discontinued on plot 1 and subsequently three pounds sodium nitrate per tree substituted. Similarly sulphate of ammonia, five pounds per tree, replaced superphosphate in plot 2. Yields in 1923 of 6.1 and 4.17 boxes per tree respectively as compared with 1.48 and 1.83 boxes for plots 3 and 5, where nitrogen was still withheld, indicates the wisdom of these changes. The value of nitrogen fertilizers is again reflected in 1924, notably in the case of plot 5, previously held as an unfertilized check. In this case heavy applications of dried blood and nitrate were made.

Results thus obtained merit further discussion and interpretation, if possible. What were the outstanding factors associated with the splendid yields of 1923? First, it is recalled that an unusually favorable blossoming period occurred that year, the weather being uniformly light, and warm. Furthermore, the results of the heavy pruning that year are outstanding. Relatively, the importance of nitrogenous fertilizers, although clear cut, was minor. The writer suggests that adequate supply to all portions of the tree, resulting from heavy pruning, together with a "balanced" condition of nutrition in the tree were factors of major importance. Recall again the splendid results for 1922 in Plot 5 (unfertilized). Differences in the matter of yields and unfertilized trees are relatively small. It is suggested that trees thus left practically unpruned until 1922 accumulated an excess of carbohydrates out of proportion with available nitrates, thus making for unfruitfulness.

In the heavy pruning by pruning of such accumulated plant food it is thought that a "fruiting balance" was restored even in the case of unfertilized trees. The small yields for 1923 suggest the alternate bearing habit of d'Anjou following heavy cropping. Local experience, however, teaches that this variety is not necessarily an irregular cropper, some orchards, giving good yields practically every year, where favorable conditions prevail. The 1924 season was one during which this experimental orchard was expected to perform in a manner similar to 1922. Unfortunately frost conditions during blossoming intervened and again in 1925 unfavorable weather operated as a limiting factor.

Taken as a whole results are somewhat unsatisfactory. The average of but four or five boxes per tree over a period of five years on extremely large, eighteen-year-old trees may be considered as a subnormal performance. Obviously the use of nitrogen fertilizer alone cannot be considered a panacea for heavy bearing, nor is it possible to practice heavy pruning each year to insure results. Coincidentally with the heavy pruning in 1922 in the alfalfa block a similar block of trees known as the vetch block was given various pruning treatments. Heavy vetch has been seeded each spring, and disced under during the following spring. A three pound sulfate of soda per tree has also been made. Heavy thinning and heading back in 1923 were practiced in one portion of this block. Furthermore, heavy thinning out only, simulates the character of pruning in another portion. A very crowded and densely shaded condition also obtained in this block of trees previous to pruning of this character. Previously light yields in 1920 and 1921 also featured.

The more favorable conditions for growth and fruiting in the Bartlett block have previously been referred to. The trees are planted at the same distance as the balance of the orchard, but owing to the generous spacing considerably smaller portions of the alfalfa are thus favored.

Trees in vetch block heavily thinned and headed in 1922 gave considerably better yields than similar trees thinned only that year, there being 12.5 boxes per tree average on the former and 3.5 on the latter. The following year, however, results were favorably thinned only. This is largely accountable by the fact that heavy heading back in 1923 on the one hand removed and thinning only, unremoved many upper and outer fruit buds favorably, whereas heavy heading back of fruiting in 1925. As will be noted, heavy pruning in both cases occurred only in 1922 and was not repeated in

1923 or 1924. This was due to comparatively small tree growth, especially during 1923, the heavy production year. Pruning subsequent to that year has been moderately light, thinning only consisting in the removal of water sprouts and small growth. Irrespective of the comparative merits of thinning versus heading under conditions obtaining in the vetch block an unproductive shaded and crowded condition still remains. With extremely large trees only 20 feet apart the complete removal of some appears to be the only ultimate source of relief.

In the case of the unpruned trees in the Bartlett block it is emphasized that growing conditions are essentially different than elsewhere in this orchard. The trees are especially large, bushy, but with very extensive outer bearing surfaces fully exposed to the sunlight. A crowded condition does not exist. Notice what these unpruned and uncrowded trees have been doing. In 1922 the average yield was 13.26 boxes in 1923, 24.0 boxes; in 1924, 15.0 boxes. The 17.6 box average per tree for a period of three years (more than double that in the vetch block) is significant. The relatively high average of 13.5 boxes per tree for adjacent pruned trees in the uncrowded Bartlett block is also outstanding.

Time will not permit the speaker to go into detail with reference to certain spur pruning and bud thinning experiments performed in a few trees in rather shaded portion of the vetch block in 1921 and 1922. In some cases one half, and in others two-thirds, of the bloom buds were removed by hand just as they were expanding in early spring. The aim was to increase the "set" of fruit if possible by so doing. Counts made indicate as many as 8,000 or more blossom clusters on a single tree. Where one-half of the buds were thus removed yields were somewhat increased but in the case of the two-thirds removal a net loss was sustained. Under the crowded shaded conditions obtaining in trees thus handled results of bud pruning were unproductive of practical conclusions other than to strengthen the conviction relating to the need of adequate sunlight and space.

In conclusion it seems worthy of emphasis that the d'Anjou pear requires especially favorable conditions for satisfactory bearing. That it is quite sensitive to growing conditions is reflected in the irregularity of cropping, one orchard with another. It is usually classified as a "shy" bearer but experience indicates that this is not necessarily so. The exceptions would rather appear to sustain this point. Since productiveness or unproductiveness is not the product of chance but rather the result of certain fundamental conditions which are incompletely understood it seems reasonable to expect that orchards often given to irregularity in bearing may be made to perform in a more satisfactory manner. From this discussion certain conclusions appear warranted.

First of all it is emphasized that the d'Anjou under favorable conditions is a rapid grower and ultimately becomes a very large tree, and this fact should be recognized by those planting this variety. Twenty-eight or thirty feet apart, seems none too far on strong soils. During the development period extremes should be avoided in pruning. Experience does not favor heavy cutting, especially in young, vigorous trees, after they have been properly headed and the branching system established. Owing to the natural vigor and tendency of this variety to make natural growth, very light thinning out may be practiced. On the other hand, heavy pruning, especially heading back, is productive of excess wood, especially in the lower and inner portions of the tree, the subsequent removal of which at considerable expense is necessary, all to no purpose. It is no exaggeration to say that the 10-year-old, unpruned trees referred to, although now in need of a certain amount of thinning out, may be put in first class shape in practically the same amount of time as that annually required in pruning where this is made an annual practice.

This point of view is sustained by a record of yields. The chief difference today between these comparatively young pruned and unpruned trees is that the former has a limited amount of old wood, with a proportionately small amount of fruit spurs, and a relatively large amount of one year old and as yet unproductive wood; whereas the latter has an immense accumulation of old wood with spurs, in addition to a large amount of new wood.

That it is unwise to permit trees to remain comparatively unpruned after the period of development in closely set orchards is also brought out by data presented. Failure to recognize this fact resulted in the densely shaded and crowded condition referred to, in the older trees, thus making for unproductiveness. On the other hand, the severe pruning which restored fruitfulness in 1922 cannot be considered except in the light of a "special practice to fit a special need." The satisfactory response of the large, unpruned trees in the Bartlett block is evidence of this fact. Furthermore, it is obvious that nitrogen fertilizers have been a distinct benefit under the conditions indicated. These are some of the outstanding features as they apply to conditions at Hood River.

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Notice of Sale of Real Property In the County Court of the State of Oregon for Hood River County.

In the matter of the Estate of James B. Blanton, deceased.

Pursuant to an order of the County Court of Hood River County, made and entered on the 30th day of May, 1925, notice is hereby given that the undersigned executor of said estate will sell at private sale, on and after the 23rd day of July, 1925, the following described real property belonging to said estate:

The east 7/8 part of Lot 2 in Block 9 of Fairview Addition to the City of Hood River, Oregon.

Bids will be received at the office of A. W. Oudbank in the First National Bank Building, Hood River, Oregon, the sale to be made on the following terms: One-half or more in cash, balance on promissory note of purchaser, secured by first mortgage on said premises, drawing interest at seven per cent per annum, payable on or before two years, interest payable semi-annually.

Dated and published June 25, 1925. JAMES C. BLANTON, Executor.



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