

Miscellaneous.

THE CULTURE AND MANAGEMENT OF TOBACCO.

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Tobacco has for some years past engrossed the attention of a large portion of the agricultural community of this State and North Carolina. The counties of Henry and Patrick, Virginia, and some parts of a few other counties in this State, and Caswell and Rockingham in North Carolina, have surpassed any section of the United States in the production of an extra manufacturing article; and although it must be confessed that the lands in this section are better adapted to the production of this commodity, yet we have seen lands suited well for making fine tobacco where only a very common article was produced.

Believing, therefore, that a great deal depends on the management, and that the finest crop on the hill may be butchered and ruined by bad management, we will in this article give such directions as are backed by practical experience, and will venture to assert that no manager of the soil will lose anything by following the path here laid out before him. First, then, we will begin with

THE KINDS OF TOBACCO.

We have no hesitation in asserting that there is a very great difference in crops managed in the same way, arising from the different kinds of tobacco planted.

The two kinds most used in this section are the broad and narrow leaf Orconico. — The latter, though rather an uncertain crop, owing to its liability to spot, is of by far the finest texture, and will ripen at least two weeks sooner than any other article grown in this section. It is liable to the objection of being rather small for wrapping, and when planted on very rich land will, if the season is at all wet, be almost certain to fire up; but planted on moderate new land, or kind gray old land, it will produce a finer and sweeter article than any other kind. It is very heavy, and will outweigh a larger plant of the other kind.

The broad leaf is very desirable for wrapping, and when not too large, will make a very pretty article; but its texture is decidedly coarser than the other, even on the same land. The leaf is thinner, the veins coarser, and it is to a certain degree lacking of that oily richness which the narrow leaf possesses. It is much less liable to spot, and therefore can be grown on stronger land. The other kinds, we think, are about equal in all respects; while some possess one desirable quality, they also possess many objectionable ones.

There is a kind now greatly used in our country which seems to be a mixture of the broad and narrow leaf of Orconico, which is very desirable and our experience is, that it should be cultivated, for it loses many of the objections of both by the mixture; and, while it loses some of the good qualities, it is, upon the whole, a very fine kind of tobacco. It will be observed, by what has been said, that neither this nor the narrow-leaf is fit for any other than a fine manufacturing article.

SAVING SEED.

The earliest and most promising plants should be burned out for seed. These should be pruned of everything except the large leaves, and only the two topmost branches left to bloom.

The plant should be carefully suckered at the rest of the tobacco, and about the first of October every pod not thoroughly ripe should be plucked off, and the seed cut off and put in a dry place to cure.

When dry, they should be rubbed out and sifted, and put up in some dry vessel, such as a dry gourd, and kept where no dampness can get to them. Seed preserved in this way will keep ten years.

SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF PLANT.

BED.

We prefer a gentle slope, with a southern or southeastern exposure, a rich, gray soil, remote from any field or other opening if it is possible.

We never yet have known any other land absolutely certain for plants. While some years plant-beds in the field may turn out well, yet the utmost precaution, other years, will not be sufficient to keep the insects from devouring them; while, if the beds are in the woods, they are rarely ever found by the fly, and scarcely ever injured to any great extent.

We never knew a bed in the woods, properly selected and properly managed, to fail. We have seen some land in second growth of pine to produce plants admirably, and, as far as our experience goes, some of the very best in this kind of land. But a bed in an open field is never certain. This is the conclusion, after a great deal of practical experience, which, to us, is worth all the slip-shod theory ever published.

Avoid land that is too wet, for on it your plants, though they may eventually come, will very generally be too tall.— On a hill-side damp enough, if it is in the woods, the plants will fit at least three weeks earlier. Red land, no matter how rich, is uncertain, and should be avoided.

After a piece of land has been found, select a dry time from the first of December to the first of February—the sooner the better—and after raking off the leaves lay down sheets about three inches apart, and about three feet apart, across which lay down a bed of wood about five or six feet wide, and high enough to burn about an hour and a half, and then have a sufficient quantity to move, so there will be no difficulty in kindling after the first time. When it has burned enough, move the fire about as far as the width of the first layer, then as far as the width of the second, and so on. Brush adds greatly to the burning of the fire, and must be used with every layer. Every farmer ought to provide himself with iron hooks for pulling plant-bed fires. There may be such a thing as burning land too hard, but we give it as our opinion that, where one bed is injured by bad burning, ten are injured for want of it. We have heard a great deal about raising plants with guano, and without burning; but in every case we have witnessed, it proved a dismal failure, if the burning was at all dry one.

We have seen the most carefully prepared bed without burning, by the side of well-burnt beds, and receiving double the attention of the others, prove worthless, while the burnt beds were good. Therefore, we advise, with the present lights, that no one shall leave the old way so far as to mix a crop of tobacco for want of plants.

We think that, for every ten thousand hills to be planted, there ought to be at least ten yards square of plant-land. A bed ten yards square will plant more than an acre, if it is good; but it is much better to have some for your neighbor than to be under the necessity of begging plants.

After the land has been well burnt, it should be allowed to lay until the first or second week in February, so that the rain and frost may have the effect of pulverizing the land as much as possible; then with mattock, dig up the land so as not to turn it over at all; and with hilling-hoes and rakes, pulverize the land thoroughly, remove all the roots, and if the land is thin, sprinkle a light coat of manure (clear of grass seed), and chop it again, and the bed is ready for sowing.

We think a large handful-spoonful of seed to the ten yards square is fully enough. The seed should be carefully mixed with nice sifted ashes, about half the seed sown over one way, and the other half sown by walking across the first sowing. By this the seed will be more regularly sown.

After the seeds are sown, the land should be lightly raked and rolled or trodden until it is smooth—and now is the time to manure. Along in the fall there should be some stalks in the stable cleaned out, and the horses kept in them should be fed on corn and fodder, and no litter of any kind be put in. The manure from the horses should be collected and remain until you wish it for plant-beds.—

It should then be chopped and sprinkled a little more than half an inch thick regularly over the beds. The manure should not be suffice to get wet until it is used. This should be the last manuring, unless the spring is very dry, and then a light top-dressing once a week would be beneficial. As to the use of guano on plant-beds, we are not prepared to recommend it as highly as stable manure. It has never failed for us as well, and we see no use in trying it, when we can easily get a better article out of our stables. We like to try experiments, but do not think it safe to venture too far from the good old ways; until experience has taught us the new way is better. We have known men, sensible in all other matters to trust their whole crops to unburnt guano beds, and uniformly known that they were plant-beds, and very considerably cooled in their zeal against old fogyism.

We will add that, in the absence of stable manure, a light top dressing of plaster will be service; but if you have good stable manure "let well enough alone," for, if the direction is in land and manure be followed, there is about as much chance to fail in plants as there is to fail to go to sleep at night, after burning land hard all day.

About the first of March the beds should be re-trod and carefully covered with straight fine twig brush. Dogwood is the best brush, owing to the fineness and thickness of its twigs.

The brush should never be removed until the plants are large enough to pretty well cover the land. There are few circumstances under which a plant-bed, in the right locality, well burnt and manured, should be watered. We are disposed to think that watering is generally a disadvantage, unless the spring is very dry.

PREPARATION OF LAND.

The first thing is to take up every growth not too large to grub, and throw these in heaps, as they are called, beginning with a handful of ten or twelve plants, set with stalks straight up as they can be made to stand, and the leaves slightly tucked on the ground. Then, with other handfuls, set around so that each handful shall bear its own weight.

When all the tobacco near the spot is set up this way, have the stalks covered with bushes, so that the sun cannot burn the outside, and as soon as it is all packed in have it nailed to the barn-door and scaffolded.

If the cutting is put off morning,

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SCAFFOLDING.

This should always be done at the barn-door. The scaffold should be made with the poles pointing to the door, so that there is no necessity of walking across them. It should be made just high enough for the tails of the tobacco to touch the ground, to prevent the air from passing under, and if the weather be mild the tobacco may be suffered to remain on the scaffold until it is sufficiently yellow for firing; but if the weather is cool and windy the tobacco should be put in the house as soon as it is cut.

Wind will disfigure the finest tobacco in a very short time, and make it look very common. After the 1st of October, it is best to house immediately.

When the weather is favorable for yellowing on the scaffold, it will generally take from three to five days, according to the color of the plant on the hill. In the house it will take longer to yellow, and will take greater care to cure it so. But it can certainly be cured yellow by housing from the hill as by scaffolding, but we are disposed to think that it is not so sweet as when it is cured to yellow in the sun.

CURING.

There are only two modes by which fine manufacturing tobacco can be cured, viz., by fire and with charcoal. We do think that to cure tobacco with charcoal is a disgrace to the tobacco-making community. It has been totally abandoned in all the fine tobacco-growing sections; and as for sun-curing, we have very little faith that a pretty article can be cured in that way. The process of curing with fire is certainly more simple, a greater saving of time and labor, and of course certain success than any other known.

In some sections the stone for building fires can be procured, and we recommend as most best the curing with coal. With fine, dry, and with charcoal. We do think that to cure tobacco with charcoal is a disgrace to the tobacco-making community. It has been totally abandoned in all the fine tobacco-growing sections; and as for sun-curing, we have very little faith that a pretty article can be cured in that way. The process of curing with fire is certainly more simple, a greater saving of time and labor, and of course certain success than any other known.

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