

FRUIT CULTURE FOR PROFIT

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649590087

Fruit Culture for Profit by E. Hobday

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E. HOBDAY

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REPRINTED FROM "THE GARDEN."

LONDON

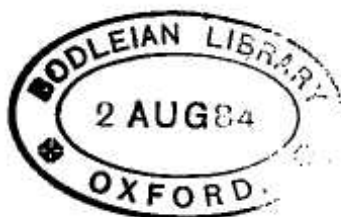
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS

BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

NEW YORK: 9 LAFAYETTE PLACE

1883

1018: . + .



Robinson's Country Series.

The Potato in Farm and Garden.

The Apple in Garden and Orchard.

Old-fashioned Flowers.

Mushroom Culture.

London Market Gardens.

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FRUIT CULTURE FOR PROFIT.

THE object which I have in view in regard to this matter is to popularize fruit culture by creating a general interest in it. That hardy fruit-culture is in a backward state in this country it is impossible to doubt; the state of many orchards loudly proclaims this fact: but all that any one person can hope to do is just to add a little to the general fund of knowledge, to throw a little light here and there on the obscure places, and so help to carry the subject onwards. It is the Vine which has made the peasant farmers in France so prosperous, and if small farms in this or any other country are ever to yield a living profit, fruit-culture must be made to furnish one of the main props. The demand for fruit for our ever-growing town populations is constantly increasing, and it must be borne in mind that, unless we are up and doing, the foreigner, with his greater aptitude for minutia in his work, his greater care in small things, will step in and reap the profit. I shall try to say all I want to say as plainly as I can without weighting myself with a single unnecessary word, and for this reason I shall eschew all scientific and technical terms. The title may to some seem rather out of place, inasmuch as I am not treating upon market fruit-growing exclusively; I am trying to take a comprehensive view of the subject, looking into all its details, and I contend that all fruit-culture, whether it be carried out on a small scale for

home supply or in a market garden, either is or should be regarded from the standpoint of profit and loss.

THE GOOSEBERRY.

In some of the northern and midland counties, societies have long ago been established for the purpose of encouraging the production of large individual fruits, and through their agency have sprung up those monster berries we occasionally read about in the newspapers. To the amateur growers clustered round the large northern and midland towns the culture of the Gooseberry for exhibition becomes an interesting pursuit, and is the cause of much emulation leading to much thought and study bearing upon the best methods of increasing the size and weight of the fruit. Though we may not always sympathize with a given object, we must admire earnest, steady, persistent effort, even though we fail to see its real utility. I remember a good many years ago visiting an amateur's garden who was famed as a prize-taker at the Gooseberry shows, and the way in which his bushes were trimmed and trained, and the manner in which their wants were supplied, especially in the way of moisture, was most interesting. The fruits were severely thinned, and little dishes of water were placed under the bushes, so that during the warm sunny days a soft and genial atmosphere constantly enveloped the fruit, adding much to their size. Though the production of monster Gooseberries is interesting to those members of Gooseberry societies who are anxious to win a prize, they do not meet a really useful want, and need not be further referred to here. Such kinds as Crown Bob that bear immense crops of berries for gathering green, or the Warrington for making into jam when ripe, are better to grow for profit. Gooseberries are adapted for planting in various positions,

but the soil for the main crop must be deep and rich. In poor soil in dry summers the fruit never attains full size or flavour, though, for meeting special wants, positions not generally suitable for producing first-rate fruit may still be profitably utilized. In large towns there is a brisk demand for early green Gooseberries for making tarts, &c., and they are eagerly bought up in the neighbourhood of Exeter and other places on the west coast for the London markets, as a week, or even a very few days in point of earliness, adds immensely to their value. Thus, anybody in possession of a warm, dry, early bank may plant it with Gooseberries for gathering green to obtain them early, in the same way that warm sunny slopes are planted with Strawberries to meet the first demand, and such a crop is often more profitable than if permitted to ripen.

Form of Bush.—The Gooseberry may be trained as pyramids or espaliers, or as palmettes on fences or walls, but the bush form is best, as it involves no expense in training. The bush should stand on a clear straight leg, not much less than 9 in. or 1 ft. long. The head should be made to assume a circular form, with the centre kept open by pruning for the purpose of letting in the air and sunshine, as well as to enable the fruit to be readily gathered; an expert cultivator with a good eye and a sharp knife finds no difficulty in making his bushes assume the desired shape. If we take a cutting of a Gooseberry or Currant bush, say 15 in. long, cut out all the eyes except the three upper ones, cut the base across smoothly beneath a joint, plant its lower 3 in. firmly in the ground, and mulch with short manure or litter, the three eyes or buds left will in nearly every case make three shoots, and at the end of the first year commences the pruner's work of training the bush, and this is done simply by pruning to an eye pointing in the direction we wish the future branch to take.