CHAPTER XII

APRIL—THE THIRD WEEK, CONTINUED

About this time of year a tree agent will rap at your front door and urge you to buy fruit trees. The probability is that he is honest, believes what he tells you about the excellence of his wares, and is trying to make a living. But be firm and send him away without an order, or if he overcomes your judgment give him a small order and when the trees come cut off the roots and use the tops as brush for your pea vines. Don’t set them out for fruit-bearing purposes in the years to come.

When rid of the agent go to the nearest nursery-man who has been established in the business a long time and buy your trees direct of him, after telling him just what you want and getting his personal assurance that what he sells you is true-to name or type, that it is free from disease, and that it comes from good-bearing stock.
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It helps to do this even if you are an amateur and obliged to depend upon the word of the grower. It is not so much a question of the honesty of the nurseryman as of his interest. The honesty can be taken for granted, but he will use more care in selecting for you after a personal talk, and this method is surely worth the time and the carfare you put into it. As for the cost, the price you will pay for a single tree or by the dozen is much less than what you would have to pay the travelling agent, who frequently knows nothing about trees.

Remember that in setting out fruit trees you are embarking upon a venture that will last for years. It is much more serious than planting a row of corn—hence the necessity for Everyman's starting right on his miniature orchard of one or a dozen trees.

It is taken for granted that he will in the course of his gardening pass through the small-fruit stage, and after establishing his berry patch will begin to think of trees. He ought to anyway.

If he has plenty of room the standard trees will do. If space is limited there are the dwarf trees, taking up very little room, bearing much sooner
than big trees, and yielding, in some cases, a better quality, though the same variety of fruit that the standards bear.

So far as apples and pears are concerned it is safe to say that the dwarf trees will better meet the requirements of Everyman and his suburban property than the big ones. But he may have the Baldwin or the Northern Spy or any other variety that he may desire just the same. A dwarf fruit tree is simply one that has been made up by the combination of a scion from a tree bearing the sort of fruit desired and a root of some slower-growing tree.

For instance the nurseryman gets his dwarf pears by taking a scion from an ordinary or standard pear tree—Bartlett or any other variety—and grafting it on a quince root. The union between the two is perfect. The slow-growing quince root will never allow the pear top to reach regular pear-tree size, but the fruit will be of the same size and always true to type.

The dwarf apple, for the purposes of the commercial nurseryman, is obtained as a rule by grafting the various scions of standard trees on the roots of the Paradise apple.
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One great advantage of the dwarf apple tree to Everyman, who may want to be a real farmer and move to a bigger place eight or ten years from now, is that it will bear in two or three years, whereas fruit cannot be expected from a standard apple tree inside of seven years. This material shortening of the waiting period applies to all dwarfed trees.

Stunted peach trees, only waist high, that look more like bushes than trees, and bear wonderful fruit, are obtained by grafting on plum roots. An even more diminutive peach tree is had by using the root of the dwarf sand cherry. This dwarf sand cherry is also the root used in making vest-pocket plum trees.

Dwarf pears of nearly all the popular varieties can be bought of any first-class nursery for twenty or twenty-five cents each, with material reduction on lots of ten or more trees. The same nurseryman probably will sell you dwarf apples at twenty-five cents a tree.

These two—apple and pear—are the only fruits that the American nurserymen have so far made a business of dwarfing. To get the peaches and plums in the stunted form requires something of a
hunt or a little experimental work with grafting on your own account.

Among the obvious advantages of this dwarf fruit is the ease in getting at all parts of the trees, without the aid of poles or ladders, to prune and spray and pick the fruit. Furthermore the trees may be shaped and trained almost as readily as a grapevine or a wistaria. Pears and peaches can be made to grow against a wall or trellis at the end of the garden. Dwarf apples, kept down to single stems or cordons and allowed to go straight up or bent into horizontal growth, can be converted into a perfect fruit-bearing screen. Apple trees grown in this fashion may be set as close as two feet apart. Apples allowed to take bush form will thrive with only seven-foot intervals. And the same is true of all the other dwarf fruit. So no matter how small his space Everyman may have some sort of an orchard.

As to soil requirements, the need of careful cultivation and pruning, and the absolute necessity for spraying, the rules for the dwarf fruit plantation are practically the same as for the orchard of big trees.
Perhaps you own the place, have lots of room, expect to live on it all your life and leave it to your children, and have an old-fashioned notion that an apple tree should be big enough to hang a swing from and that fruit tastes better and more natural if you have to climb for it. In that case two or three different varieties of apple trees, standard size, a pear, a cherry, a plum and a quince, and three or four peach trees, early, medium and late varieties, are what you want. Standard trees live longer than the dwarfs.

The most successful orchards are those grown on former forest land. That is not so hopeless a statement for Everyman as it sounds at first, inasmuch as many a suburban place is on the site of what was timber land a generation ago.

But to be more specific, the peach does best on sandy loam, the pear and apple prefer a clay loam, and the plum will grow in heavier soil than any of the other fruit trees. Nevertheless all these fruits will thrive, especially in small, well-cherished family orchards, on any reasonably good soil, so the naming of the ideal conditions need not deter Everyman whose place does not quite measure up to them.
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One old-fashioned notion that must be discarded at the outset is that fruit trees will take care of themselves when once stuck into the ground, that an orchard needs no cultivation, and that for some queer reason the land selected for fruit growing may be expected to produce its crop and a crop of grass or weeds or vegetables at the same time. That is all wrong, but it is the one fallacy—next to the one that hens need only corn—that the average farmer is most persistent in sticking to.

Prepare the ground in the first place as carefully as you would that of the vegetable garden, only plow or spade deeper. Cultivate the young orchard until the middle of August and then sow crimson clover in it, to be ploughed under next April. This is to stock the soil with humus or rotting vegetable matter and to furnish an ample supply of nitrogen for the wood growth without paying the price of expensive commercial nitrates. For the rest of the fertilizing use manure and wood ashes or some other supply of potash. Without potash there can be no fruit.

If there is any difference in the lay of the land give the apple trees the coldest, most exposed posi-
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ations and the peaches the warmest and most sheltered.

Apple trees—we are not talking about the dwarfs now—should be twenty feet apart. The rule for a commercial orchard is forty feet, but in the back-yard plantation, where there will be plenty of individual care for each tree, closer planting may be allowed and the trees can be pruned so they will not interfere with one another. The peaches should have at least twelve feet, as against the fifteen or eighteen of big plantations.

At the nursery get one-year-old trees, true to name and of good shape and size. Have the ground prepared and the holes dug before the trees arrive so there will be no delay during which the roots can dry out. If it is not possible to plant as soon as they come lay them in a trench and cover the roots with moist earth.

Pruning is a problem that lasts all through the life of a fruit tree, but it is never more important than when the trees first arrive from the nursery. In digging them out of the nursery rows some of the larger roots have been broken and many of the fine feeding roots and rootlets have been torn. This is inevitable, but it does no harm if the knife is used
skillfully. There has been no corresponding damage to the top part of the tree in the digging at the nursery, so, as received by Everyman, the tree is out of balance — too much branch to be supported properly by the remaining root system at the beginning of growth in his orchard. So the main stem of the tree must be cut down — to two feet for peaches and plums; to three feet for pears and apples. Furthermore the side branches must be trimmed off — cut off entirely on the new peach trees and to within a few inches of the main stem on apples and pears.

This cutting back of the main stem is not only to relieve the roots of too much strain, but also for the all-important forming of the head of the tree and determining its future form. The lower that head is formed, the easier it is going to be later on to gather fruit, to spray and to prune the tree. Also the tree is going to save itself by its own shade from the dangers of sun scald, and it is going to be better prepared to stand up against heavy winds.

Do not leave more than four side branches; three are better. They should grow, of course, in differ-
ent directions and should not start from the same level on the main stem. If they do the danger of splitting off under pressure of wind or the weight of a big fruit crop is greatly increased.

The roots must be pruned too, to the extent of cutting off all broken or torn ends. Then see to it that the roots left are well spread out in the hole. Hold the tree upright as well-pulverized earth is shovelled back into the hole and joggle it up and down so that the soil will fill in all the cavities and crevices about the roots and rootlets. There must be no air spaces left. As each tree is thus set, firm the soil about it with your foot, just as you would firm the earth above a row of garden seed, and then scatter over the top a handful of loose soil to form an earth mulch to keep the moisture underground about the roots where it belongs.

Pruning and spraying—two very essential operations in the successful growing of tree fruits—are usually associated with the idea of cold weather, as the work is best done in the dormant season. That is true enough of the heavy pruning and reforming of trees and of the spraying for scale, which unfortunately is the only spraying many fruit growers
seem to think is necessary. But much effective work can be done in June with both knife and pump.

For the knife, however, substitute the thumb for the greater part of the cleaning on small fruit trees. Simply rub off the new leaf or tender sprout as soon as it shows on trunk or branch at a point where new growth is not wanted. A minute or two of thumb pruning on each young fruit tree now and then in the summer effects two great economies—it saves hours of heavy pruning with knife or shears next year when the sprout has developed into a branch or twig that is not wanted and, what is more to the point so far as the welfare and future productivity of the tree are concerned, this getting rid of unnecessary growth at its very start saves energy and plant food to go into the development of the wood, foliage and fruit that are wanted. For example, the so-called suckers that grow on neglected fruit trees, sapping their strength and yielding no return, would never come if the summer pruning was as thorough as it should be.

This applies particularly to the apple and peach trees. It is seldom the custom to prune cherries or plums in summer and they require very little cutting
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in winter; but pears are apt to throw out suckers that should be cut off.

With the peaches and apples the thing may be overdone. On trees set out this spring it is better, perhaps, to eliminate the summer pruning altogether, provided the trees were properly cut back and trimmed when they were set out. The young trees need about all the foliage they can produce to supplement the work of the new root system in giving the whole plant a good, first-year start. But here again the amateur, wrestling with his first fruit-tree problem, must use some judgment. Suppose, for example, the new tree is making good growth in leaf and new wood at the top and a branch starts out from the trunk at the ground, as frequently happens. It is obvious that that branch should be cut off, because it will simply be a nuisance later on.

At the end of the first year's growth take a two-foot rule and measure all the new twigs on your young peach tree. If they total up three hundred or four hundred inches there has been good, healthy development, indicative of proper care and fertilization and correct soil conditions. In the second year thumb pruning may be freely indulged in, and much
done by it toward shaping the tree as it should grow — opened up enough inside to let the sunlight reach all the fruit to colour it, not too high for convenience and thoroughness in spraying and for ease in picking, and without horizontal branches so low or far-reaching as to interfere with thorough cultivation close to the tree. These suggestions apply to the small fruit plantation as well as to the large commercial orchard.

Winter spraying of fruit trees, as already said, is primarily for the San Jose scale, although it helps the general health of the trees. It should be done with lime-sulphur in the proportion of one to nine — that is, in every ten quarts of the applied mixture there should be nine quarts of water and one quart of the lime-sulphur.

Then comes the blossom spraying to get rid of the curculio. This should be with a solution of arsenate of lead in water, in the proportion of a pound of the lead paste to sixty quarts of water. Apply this to peach and apple trees when the petals are falling.

Aphids or plant lice are best controlled by a spray of kerosene emulsion — a useful thing to use for
various troubles of fruit trees, including the pear tree psylla in June. You can make this for yourself very easily. Take half a pound of fish-oil soap — formerly known as whale oil — and dissolve it in a gallon of water. Then put it with two gallons of kerosene. Ordinary stirring with a stick will not cause a sufficiently thorough and even mixture, but this difficulty is overcome by pumping in a lot of air and churning the soap water and kerosene together. Take an ordinary bicycle pump and put the end of the pipe into the liquid.

Scab and brown rot, which attack plums, apples and peaches, can be controlled by summer spraying with Bordeaux mixture or the kerosene emulsion. Brown rot also attacks the cherry and this tree should receive the same treatment.

A beetle, light brown in colour and about a quarter of an inch long, called the quince curculio, attacks the fruit for which it is named. It punctures the fruit, making it knotty and wormy. Spread a sheet on the ground under the tree and then shake the tree. Many of the bugs will fall on to the sheet so they can be gathered up and destroyed. The spray remedy for this quince-tree trouble is Bordeaux
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or arsenate of lead, the same proportions as given above for peach and apple, used after the fruit is set.

For leaf spot and fruit rot of plums spray with Bordeaux, not only when the blossoms fall but again when the fruit is about two-thirds grown. Even then there is bound to be some spoiling of the fruit, especially in a season of much muggy weather, because the plum is the most difficult of all the tree fruits to pull through in good condition.

For tree fruits dig the following fertilizer mixtures into the soil within a radius of four or five feet about the trees:

For apples, pears and quinces— one pound of nitrate of soda, seven pounds of bonemeal, two pounds of muriate of potash.

For cherries and plums— half a pound of nitrate of soda, five pounds of bonemeal, one pound of muriate of potash.

For peaches— one pound of nitrate of soda, four pounds of bonemeal, two pounds of muriate of potash.

Take a look at the map of the United States and see where your garden is with reference to latitude. If you are south of the thirty-sixth parallel the pos-
sibilities of your fruit plantation are greater than those of your brother gardener farther north. You can amuse yourself by trying unusual fruits. There is the pawpaw for instance. It is a low-growing tree of beautiful foliage, has large purple-and-white flowers and bears a very aromatic fruit, which you do not like at first but take to later on. This fruit thrives best in rich, moist soil. It has to be propagated from seed, as any other method is uncertain. Juice of both fruit and leaves makes a fine sauce that is much relished when used with meats.

The loquat will grow down South, too, all through the Gulf States. It is a tree that ordinarily attains a height of about ten feet, blooms anywhere from August to December and matures its clusters of yellow, pear-shaped and very acid fruits in the spring.

Persimmons may be made to grow in the open as far north as the thirty-eighth degree of latitude. Plant the seeds in the fall just as you would plant a peach pit, and transplant the young trees the following fall. The persimmon requires a warm soil of good loam.

The pomegranate, not hardy north of the thirty-
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fourth parallel, may be propagated from hard-wood cuttings placed in the open ground in February or from new wood cut and planted out in the summer. This tree will do as well in a hedge as growing by itself, and thus serve the double purpose of decoration and fruit producing.