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Harvesting and Packing Peaches



Fig. 0.—A well packed basket of peaches.

Address

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HARVESTING AND PACKING PEACHES

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The first thing to be considered in harvesting the peach crop is the equipment. As soon as danger of frost is past and the crop can be estimated with a reasonable degree of accuracy, it is a good plan to place orders for packing material. Usually at the height of the season the manufacturers and dealers in boxes and crates are rushed and not only is it difficult to have an order filled promptly, but the prices are likely to be higher. Also, see that plenty of picking baskets are provided and step ladders for the tall trees. In short, anticipate every possible need, for even then many things will be neglected until the last.

PICKING

If peaches are to be shipped to a near-by market, where there is a very short interval of time between leaving the orchard and delivery to the consumer, they can be picked riper than if they are to be shipped to distant markets. As a usual thing, peaches are picked while they are hard and apparently green.

No definite standard can be laid down for ripeness in the case of packed fruit, as there are important varietal differences. Yellow peaches are usually picked when the green color is changing to a whitish tint. Freestone peaches are generally ready to be picked when they have an elastic feeling when taken in the hand. They should never be pinched or squeezed, as this is likely to bruise them and cause them to decay rapidly. With a little experience, however, the fruit can, without injury, be taken in the hand and gently pressed with the ball of the thumb, to ascertain if it is ripe enough to be picked. Care should be exercised in examining the suture side of the peach, as with some varieties, and especially peaches with split stones, this will ripen-up and become soft, while the rest of the peach is green.

There are a number of receptacles used for picking peaches. Perhaps one of the best is the ordinary half-busheel basket with a wooden handle. The fruit should be carefully poured from the picking basket into the baskets or boxes in which it will be conveyed to the packing house. All blemished fruit should be left in the orchard. It is a waste of time and money to harvest cull fruit. Leave it in the field instead of taking it to the packing-house and having it handled there two or three times by high priced labor.

Peaches should be hauled to the packing house as soon after picking as possible. They should never be allowed to stand in the sun after gathering, for they ripen very rapidly. A wagon with bolster springs should always be provided for hauling the fruit.

If the orchard is large, the picking crew should be under the direct supervision of an experienced foreman, one who is not only experienced in harvesting fruit, but in handling men. The pickers should be taught to handle the fruit as carefully as if they were handling eggs, and if any of them do not readily learn the proper method they should be placed at some other work or their services dispensed

with, as picking is one of the most important operations in fruit growing.

It is usually necessary to go over the orchard two or three times, and sometimes oftener, in order to pick the fruit at the proper stage of maturity. The Elberta probably ripens more evenly than most other varieties of peaches and requires a smaller number of pickings. Usually, the entire Elberta crop can be harvested at not more than three pickings.

PACKING

Never attempt to ship two varieties of fruit in the same package. Each crate or basket should contain only one variety.

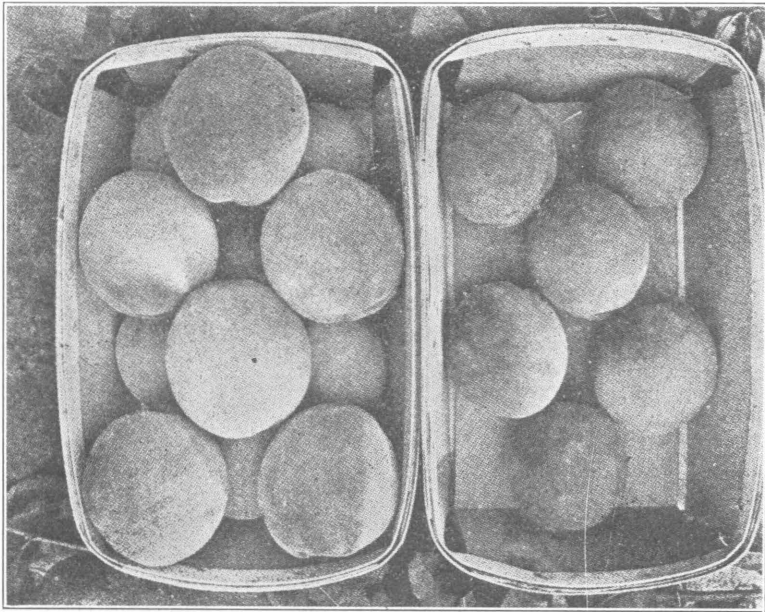


Fig. 1.—(N. J. B. No. 284—A 2-1 pack of Elbertas 8 1-4 in. circumference. Six peaches per tier, three tiers per basket, of which first and second are shown.

A number of packages are used for peaches, but the two most common in this state are the six-basket carrier often called the Georgia carrier, (See Figs. 1 to 7) and the one-bushel basket. (See title page.)

As these two packages seem to fit the need of the trade, no others will be discussed at this time.

Regardless of the package used, the fruit should be very carefully graded for size and color, discarding all specimens that show insect or disease blemishes, or that are over- or under-ripe. Too often not

enough attention is paid to grading for size, with the result that a package makes a poor appearance and consequently brings a low price. Each basket or crate should contain fruit of as near uniform size as possible. (See Figs. 1. 2. 3.) A few peaches larger in size than the average of the package will detract from its appearance just as certainly as if small fruit had been added.

Other things being equal, the package that presents the best appearance is the one that sells first and at the highest price. The packing should be absolutely honest; the peaches at the bottom and in the center of the package should be just as large and perfect as those at the top and the container must be packed tight, heaped up, otherwise there will be a loose pack, the fruit will be damaged, and arrive at the market in poor condition.

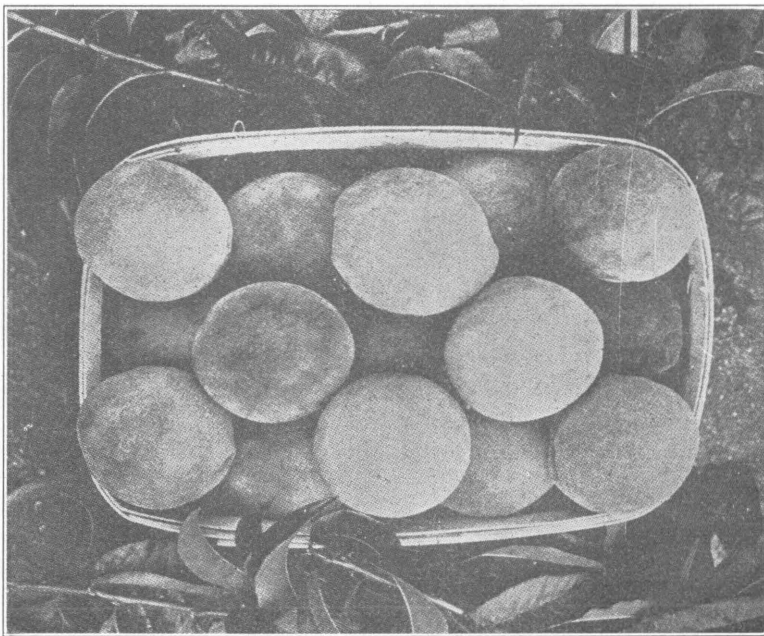


Fig. 2.—(N. J. B. No. 284)—A 2-1 three-tier pack, adapted to peaches from about 7 1-4 to 8 1-4 inches in equatorial circumference.

GRADES

As yet, there have been no definite grades established for peaches. Not only should they be graded for quality and size, but the grade and size should be marked on the package. The following grades are offered as a suggestion.

Size

Small: Below 7 inches in equatorial circumference.

Medium: 7 to 8 1-2 inches in equatorial circumference. (This is the size that is most preferred by the trade.)

Large: Above 8 1-2 inches in equatorial circumference.

Quality

Extra Fancy: Free from blemishes and of exceptional quality and appearance.

Fancy: Free from blemishes, and well colored and flavored for the variety.

"C" Grade: Not well colored, slight insect and disease injuries. This grade may include all marketable fruit not included in the first and second grades.

If such a standard of grading and classification were adopted and consistently followed, the trade would soon learn these brands and

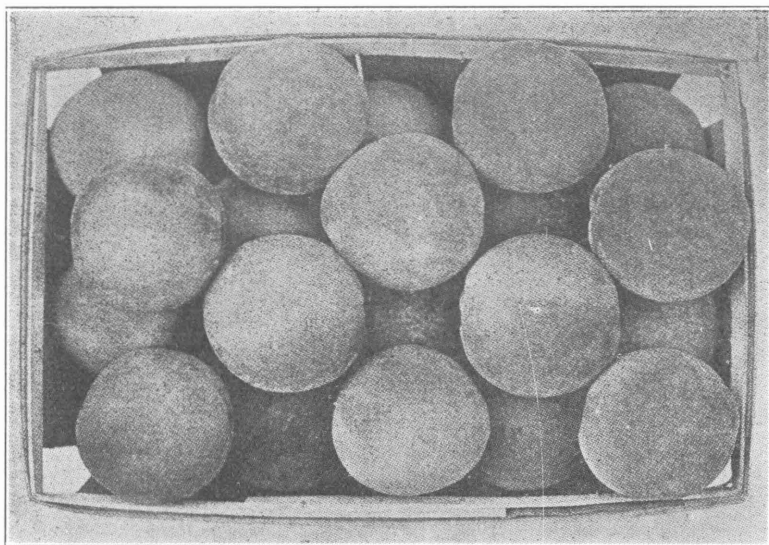


Fig. 3.—A 2-2 three-layer pack, adapted to peaches from about 6 3-4 to 7 1-4 inches in equatorial circumference.

classification. With any one variety, for instance the Elberta, nine grades would be possible, as follows:

Extra Fancy	{	Small Elberta
		Medium Elberta
		Large Elberta
Fancy	{	Small Elberta
		Medium Elberta
		Large Elberta
"C" Grade	{	Small Elberta
		Medium Elberta
		Large Elberta

Of course, it is not likely that any one grower will use all the above grades in one season. It is probable that most of the fruit will be of the Medium Size Fancy Grade.

Only the very choicest peaches should go into the Extra Fancy Grade, and the grower should so care for the orchard as to have the smallest possible quantity of "C" grade.

In the early part of the season, when the price is high, or for shipments to a distant market, the Georgia carrier will perhaps be the package preferred, but for the bulk of the crop and for near-by shipments, the bushel baskets will likely be used. This package is very rapidly coming into favor, both with growers and with the trade.

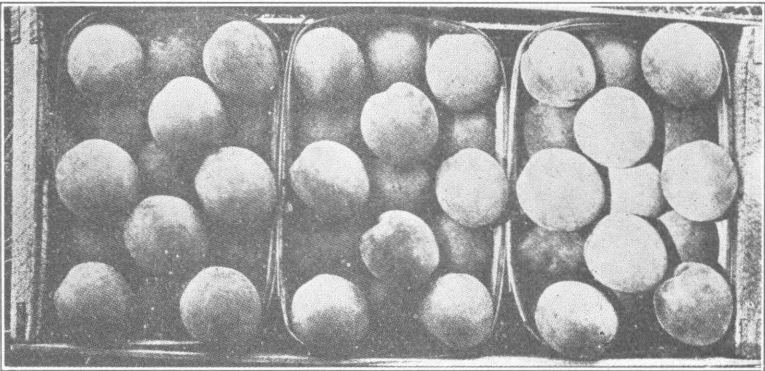


Fig. 4.—Showing a three-layer 2-1 pack. Note that the peaches come above the top of the basket and package. When the lid is nailed on every peach will be held firmly in place and the lid will have a bulge of at least an inch. See crate on left of Fig. 6.

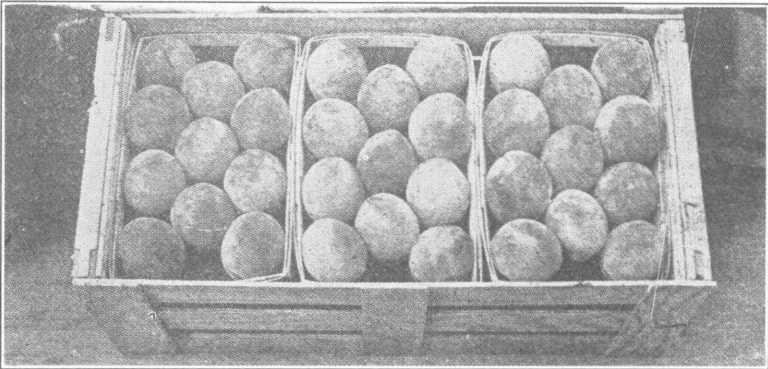


Fig. 5.—Straight 2-1 two-layer pack. Not desirable and to be avoided. Note that level of peaches is below level of baskets and crate; fruit will not be held firmly in place by top. See crate with no bulge on right of Fig. 6. Such a pack will arrive at market in condition shown by Fig. 7.

Baskets should be well settled when filling and be well filled. (Fig.0.). The top of the basket should press uniformly over the top layer of peaches, so that the fruit will not roll or shift when the basket is turned or inverted. This may bruise a few of the top peaches, but if the package is not filled heaping full the fruit will shift and not only be bruised by moving about but will shake down and on arriving on the market will give the appearance of a slack or short pack.

There are two styles of pack commonly recognized in this country for filling the baskets of the Georgia carrier. They are the straight (Fig. 5.) and the diagonal or alternate pack (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4.) In the straight packs the individual fruits of each tier or layer are placed directly over those below in a regular manner (Fig. 5). This style of pack is objectionable for any tree fruits, because the fruit is likely to be bruised in shipping and hauling. In the diagonal or alternate pack,

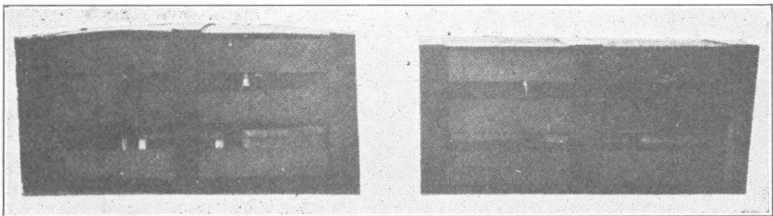


Fig. 6.—Showing a properly packed crate of peaches (on left) and one improperly packed (on right). Note the bulge on one crate while on the other the lid lies perfectly flat. The full package will bring as much money per peach as will the slack package and in case of rough handling will arrive at the market in much better condition.

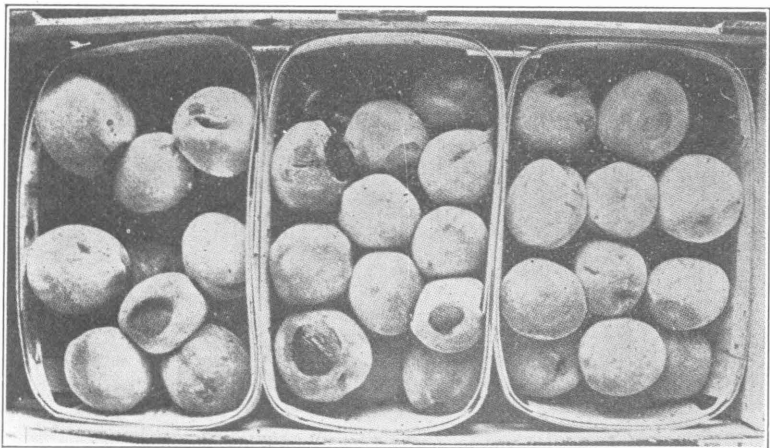


Fig. 7.—Showing the effect of a loose low pack as shown in Fig. 5. Note that the baskets are far from full and that the fruit has jostled about in the basket until it is almost unfit for use.

be bruised in shipping and hauling. In the diagonal or alternate pack the individual peaches are arranged so that those in each succeeding tier or layer are placed over the spaces between the fruits of the next lower layer (Fig. 1).

There are a number of variations in the diagonal pack that may be used with the Georgia carriers (Figs. 1, 2, 3). The packs to be used will be determined by the size of fruit to be packed.

The following table, taken from New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 284, will be found helpful as a guide for inexperienced packers. This table shows the size of the fruit in circumference and diameter, the style of pack which may be used, the number of peaches in each tier or layer and the total number of peaches per crate:

DETAILS FOR PACKING PEACHES

Equatorial Circumference	Diameter	Style of Pack	No. of Tiers	No. in First	No. in Second	No. in Third	No. in Fourth	Total per Basket	Total per crate	Notes.
5½-6	1 15-16	3-2	4	15	15	15	15	60	360	Pack of good height.
5¾-6	1 15-16	2-2	4	14	14	14	14	56	336	Pack of good height.
6¼	2	2-2	4	12	12	12	12	48	288	Pack of good height.
6½	2¼	2-2	4	10	10	10	10	40	240	Requires two 5¼-inch peaches to fill out bottom layer in each till.
6¾	2 3-16	2-2	3	10	12	12	12	34	204	Poor pack.
			3	12	12	12	..	36	216	Requires 6¼-in. fruits in bottom layer of each basket to make good pack.
7	2¼	2-2	3	10	10	10	..	30	180	Pack of good height.
7¼	2 5-16	2-2	3	10	10	10	..	30	180	Too full. Crate requires stripping.
		2-1	3	9	9	9	..	27	162	Pack of medium height.
7½	2¾	2-1	3	9	9	9	..	27	162	Pack of good height.
7¾	2 7-16	2-1	3	8	7	8	..	23	138	Pack of good height.
		2-1	3	7	8	7	..	22	132	Pack a bit slack.
8	2 9-16	2-1	3	8	7	8	..	23	138	A trifle full. Crate requires stripping.
		2-1	3	7	8	7	..	23	132	Pack of good height.
8¼		2-1	3	6	6	6	18	108	Pack of good height.

In order to arrive upon the market well filled and not slack, the fruit should be high enough above the baskets so as to give a bulge of 1 to 1½ inches to the cover when it is nailed down, as illustrated in Figure 6.