

The Bloomfield Times.

HOUSE, FARM AND GARDEN.

When and How to Cut Tobacco.

A Lancaster county tobacco raiser sends us the following: There are farmers in Perry county who have not followed tobacco growing for many years. To enable such to understand the best methods to grow, house and cure, it is proper that the experienced grower should give his experience, and the less experienced should read and learn.

THE TEST OF RIPENESS.

In from two to three weeks after it has been topped the tobacco plant begins to ripen. The change that then occurs in the plant is very marked and not to be mistaken, even by an observant novice. The uniform green color of the leaves is no longer maintained. They assume a mottled or spotted appearance. These spots are not always alike in color, but are by turns yellowish, reddish and brownish. They are discernible at a considerable distance from the plant. The upper leaves should also have expanded until they approach the lower ones in size, and the plant presents something of a uniform appearance. If, however, these signs are not sufficient, another is at hand to lend its confirmation. When ripe, the leaves become more brittle and when taken between the fingers and doubled up they break easily. Either of these indications is an infallible sign of maturity, although the former is much the safest guide to a new beginner. By watching it closely he cannot be deceived or make a mistake.

WHEN TO CUT TOBACCO.

In a plant that matures as slowly as tobacco, there are as a matter of course, various stages of ripeness, which may perplex the grower somewhat.

If the heaviest possible yield is the only object, then undoubtedly, a fully ripe plant will give the most weight. Then the plants have attained their fullest possible development, and are richest in gum, which does not evaporate as the ordinary juices of the plant do, but remains, adding to the weight. Cutting tobacco, those grown in the South and used for the manufacture of plug tobacco, are not cut until they are fully ripe. If not cut when fully matured it will begin to decrease in weight. Among many of the growers in Pennsylvania, this same course is followed. But just here the matter of color steps in and largely directs the matter. Our best growers have demonstrated to their entire satisfaction that tobacco when cut before it is fully ripe will cure a richer, darker brown than when left to mature fully; and as the ultimate value is largely dependent on its dark chestnut color, this settles the matter. There may be a slight loss in weight, it is true, but the increased price the product commands more than compensates for the loss in pounds. But this is not the only reason for early cutting, although it is amply sufficient in itself. Rain and hail storms are not uninfrequent in tobacco-growing regions, and all are aware how these can damage a crop. We have seen a splendid crop, ready to cut, reduced to poor fillers in five minutes. This is a contingency likely to occur at any hour and not to be lightly regarded. A single day may decide whether the crop will sell for 25 or 5 cents. Then, again, if the tobacco is a late crop, a well-known acquaintance of the farmer familiarly called Jack Frost, sometimes comes along when his presence is little desired, and he will settle the value of the crop even more effectually than the tobacco worms, the grasshoppers, or the flea-beetles. A timely removal of the crops from the field is the only remedy against this danger.

The weight of the various advantages is, therefore, clearly on the side of early cutting, and the Lancaster county planters have, as a rule, made that fact one of the vital points in their tobacco growing.

WHEN NOT TO CUT TOBACCO.

One of the essential constituents of tobacco is the resinous gum so palpable to the touch when a green leaf is handled. It is one of its most valuable properties, and being freely exuded by the glands of the leaf, is liable to be washed off by rains. Tobacco should, therefore never be cut immediately after a rain. Wait three or four days, during which the plant will again secrete the necessary supply of gum, and then it may be cut without danger from this cause. Neither should the plants be cut while covered with dew. If laid on the ground in that condition the dirt is likely to adhere to them. Try and avoid a very hot day if possible in which to cut tobacco. If left too long in the heat to wilt it is likely to sunburn, whether it be in the morning or afternoon. The afternoon is the favorite time to cut tobacco with many farmers, but there is no good reason why this should not be done in the morning as well, especially when the

day is cloudy and the general conditions favorable. It must not be forgotten that care is necessary to prevent sunburn. Half an hour is enough under certain circumstances to produce this result. If there is danger from this source, the tobacco should be turned as it lies on the ground. Never cut more in the morning than you can put away by noon or more in the afternoon than can be taken care of on the same day.

HOW TO CUT TOBACCO.

The cutting of the plants should be carefully done. Small saws, large knives and sharp cutters such as are used in cutting corn are used. Some prefer one instrument and some another; so that the work is done quickly and easily it don't matter what instrument is used. The operator seizes the stem of the plant—not the leaves—with his left hand, bends it over slightly and cuts or saws it off with his right hand near the ground, below the lowest leaf. The plant must be laid on the ground carefully so as not to injure the leaves. If several rows are cut through the field at the same time the plants from both may be laid together which will give ample space to perform the operation of spearing afterwards. If a number of stalks are placed in one heap less walking will have to be done later in the day. The tobacco is left lying in the rows until it has wilted sufficiently to admit of easy handling; the leaves lose their brittleness and can be manipulated more easily.

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