

SEASONABLE WORK IN THE ORCHARD-HOUSE.

BY A KENTISH GARDENER.



ALL trees in the orchard-houses under my charge, owing to the healthy condition which they are in, have set their fruit remarkably well, and we have had to remove a very considerable number, and there yet remain many which will eventually have to be removed. With the cherries I adopted the somewhat unusual plan of thinning the bloom when the trees were fully expanded; and I find this to be much the better plan, as it does not exhaust the tree so much as when all the bloom is allowed to remain and set fruit before removal. I am so well satisfied that I intend to follow it up in future seasons in all cases where there is a superabundance of it. It requires a strong nerve and some amount of judgment, I admit; but where success is desired, the earnest cultivator ought not to allow any such considerations to have any weight with him.

Owing to the cold weather which prevailed during the last two months, we have had more than our usual share of insects, but we have managed to keep them under pretty well. In the first place, an attack of the brown-fly occurred just as the peaches and nectarines were in full bloom. This prevented me from applying the usual remedies as soon as I saw them; but immediately the trees were out of bloom a good syringing with tobacco-water was given, which soon sent them about their business, and the trees are now beautifully clean.

The trees were no sooner rid of these pests than a fresh assault was made by a destructive maggot, as it would curl itself up in the young leaves of apricots and cherries, and if not immediately dislodged would eat holes in them, causing a sad disfigurement to the leaf; and if left undisturbed for a couple or three days, would ultimately esconce themselves in the very heart of the young growth, and destroy its further progress. So numerous were these pests that nothing but constant hand-picking every day would keep them under; but by the close of the first week in May the houses were quite clear, and continue so up to the present time.

As to red-spider, so troublesome in many orchard-houses, it is a stranger to me; for the trees are syringed vigorously every evening, and in hot weather all the borders and paths are kept constantly moist by frequent dampings two or three times during the day. As a precaution, after I have done watering and syringing in very bright weather, I shut up the houses about six o'clock, and let them remain so for an hour: this causes such a steam to rise, that every branch and leaf that has escaped the water-pot or the engine is sure to be moistened, which is very objectionable to red spider.

There is no doubt that a cold spring is favourable to the attacks of insects, as, I believe, many beside myself have been similarly troubled this season. Even in a cold season there has been a considerable amount of labour in watering, because the greater portion of our trees are in pots. No neglect of watering the trees must

occur, for the consequences if only neglected for a day will be most serious; and I know, too, that with most orchard-house trees in pots it is almost impossible to give too much water (within reasonable limits), if the pots are well and perfectly drained, from the time the bloom is set until they are showing symptoms of ripening. My impression is, that many of the failures of which we hear arise from a deficiency of water and of solid nourishment, to maintain the trees in a healthy state. My course of proceeding is, early in the month of April to mulch the trees with a thickness of three inches of the fattest half-rotten dung I can find from the linings of my early cucumber beds. This serves them until the fruit is stoned, and then I give them moderately strong doses of liquid manure three or four times a week. It may be all very well for some practitioners to cry down the plan of alternate doses of manure-water, but it will not do for me, because I know from careful observations that my trees, or anything else under my care, have never suffered from it. I therefore recommend to all orchard-house cultivators to water first with clear water, and in a few minutes after apply the liquid manure, and then the tree, or whatever it may be, will be the more benefited by it. This is always assuming that the plant is moderately dry at the commencement. There are no definite rules to be laid down as regards watering, as it depends entirely upon the state of the weather. In wet, dull, cloudy weather they will only want it every other day; but in bright sunny weather, from the 1st of April until the last day of September, they must have it every day, and that not earlier than five o'clock in the afternoon, and then sufficient must be given to moisten the whole ball of earth.

With respect to the quantity of water required by trees in pots and those planted out in the open border, I am firmly convinced that trees planted out do not require so much by one-third as those in pots, and, what is still more important, they do not suffer half so much if, through any unforeseen circumstance, they should be neglected for a day or two. Now, that is a great deal in favour of planted-out trees, to say nothing of the drawbacks of a scarcity of water, which sometimes unavoidably occurs in the best arranged gardens, and which would be fatal to potted trees.

Then, as to the value of potted trees as against those planted out, I am prepared to assert that one quarter of a large house, which is devoted to planted-out trees, will yield more fruit (except cherries) than the whole of the other part devoted to pot-trees.

As to the plunging of potted trees, there is a diversity of opinion; but those who have had experience with both plunged and unplunged trees must acknowledge we obtain the earliest fruit from the unplunged trees, as the warm air of the house acts with greater force upon the roots; but, as a set-off against this, plunged trees, either wholly or partially, do not require so much water as those standing on the surface in pots; so that we see both systems have their advantages, and the latter is an important one where water is scarce, and where the labour power is scarce also. To extend the fruiting season over as long a period as possible, it is desirable to adopt both methods with an equal portion of the different kinds of trees grown.