

Forest Tree Culture.

[Written for the Longlook Club.] I will submit a few ideas on what I know about forest tree culture. What I know about this subject may be told on a few pages. What I don't know about it would fill many volumes.

The people of this young state are fast awakening to the importance of this great interest. A vast amount is annually set out, and while full success rarely attends the efforts of our people in this great industry, yet we are gradually gaining in timber acreage—gradually gaining in our experience of the different kinds of timber and the proper cultivation of the same. As an illustration of the development of this experience I may state that many of us now know that if we plant a dead tree it won't grow. We have also found out that it is waste of time to plant trees and have them as scratching posts for cattle—it may be very pleasant for the cattle, but its death to the trees. We have learned by bitter experience that good sized trees should not be planted with puddling sticks—if you are determined to plant your tree in a hole three inches square I suggest that you cut the branches all off, sharpen the stem or trunk of your tree and drive it down with a beetle—roots upwards—it will grow just as well as if the roots were cramped into a three inch hole, and is much handier. To be successful in the raising of forest trees we must observe the same primary rules that govern in the successful raising of any other vegetable growth. We should have good, sound, living trees to plant; good soil to plant them in, and they should receive proper care when planted.

From my experience and observation I consider cottonwood, box-elder, ash, and walnut among the best kinds for planting. The cottonwood is of the quickest growth and consequently furnishes shade, shelter and fuel sooner than any other variety of tree. Our experience with the cultivated cottonwood satisfies us that it is more subject to decay than when it grows in its natural state. We must concede that the Almighty is more successful than man in this regard. Cultivated cottonwood timber, after seven years growth, generally commences to fail, principally on account of the borers, hence it would be well for the farmer who is wise in his generation to mix the cottonwoods with ash or walnut, say alternately, so that when the cottonwoods die out or are cut down, the more sturdy ash or walnut would remain as lasting memorials of the foresight and wisdom of the said farmer. And now a word in regard to the kind of ground to plant trees in. All the ground in Platte county is good enough for trees, excepting the alkali beds. All kinds of forest trees seem to flourish equally well in our valleys and on our table-lands. Perhaps the cottonwood grows more rapidly in our lower valleys where it sinks down its myriad of roots and pumps up the water for its trunk and branches, for the cottonwood, you know, is an inveterate toper.

The soil should be in good condition to insure proper growth. Trees will not prosper in a raw or young soil, because the particles are too coarse. The soil should be cultivated at least three years before the trees are planted. Of course, many trees may grow in soil if planted the second year after it is broke, but nothing is gained by planting so soon, and much is lost. A tree can not derive as much sustenance from a coarse, uncultivated soil as from a fine and cultivated soil. The fibrous roots are the great forgers of the tree, they supply it with flesh and blood, as it were, and these fibrous roots find no home in a coarse soil. Besides, the coarser the soil, the more readily it is dried out and the more injurious is the action of the frost on the roots. If trees must be put in a young or coarse soil, place abundance of mulch around the tree, this will keep the earth moist and cool in summer, and modify the action of the winter's frost.

How should a tree be planted? Well, I have not come to that part of the business yet. Before planting your tree it has to be dug up and brought to the place of planting. It is as necessary for you to be present at this business yourself as it would be for you to be present at your own wedding—neither can be properly done without you. In digging the tree out of its original site be careful and leave it plenty of roots; do not cut half the roots and then pull the tree out. Dig thoroughly around the roots, cut every one and completely sever the connection. If your child's feet were caught in the barn floor you would not pull on his arm with all your getting until you broke off his toes in strength him out. The tree is possessed of as fine and delicate organisms as your child—there are skin, veins, tendons, arteries, nerves, bone and marrow, these may all be injured or destroyed by rough usage, just the same as the organisms of a human being by like usage. If we fully understood the operations of natural laws as applied to vegetable organisms, the inevitable connection between cause and effect in the minute workings of nature, we could readily perceive the analogy existing between vegetable and animal organizations. It is safe to say that like causes will

produce like results in the vegetable as well as in the animal kingdom. There are natural causes for all deformities, imperfections and diseases. I have seen a great many lurch-back trees, many suffering from spinal disease, and not a few with broken arms and dislocated joints. Trees sometimes have scrofula, and an occasional leper is found in their ranks. All this goes to prove the necessity of preserving intact their physical organization. But to proceed with the planting of the tree. When the tree is dug up, protect the roots from the sun and wind. If you cannot remove a portion of the original soil with the roots, be careful to have them covered by a wet gunnysack or something similar until the tree is deposited in the hole prepared for it. You may exempt the cottonwood, ash and box elder from the rigid operation of this rule, but still allow as little exposure as possible in planting these trees. With all evergreens and also the walnut this rule must be strictly enforced. You must guard the roots of the walnut and the evergreen as carefully and tenderly as you would guard your own infant babe. With ash, cottonwood, maple, elm, box elder and a few other varieties you may relax the rule. We have now got to a word about the hole. It must not be a post-hole, neither should it be a cellar. The size of the hole depends largely upon the condition of the ground in which the tree is planted. If your soil has been cultivated a number of years and has had the advantage of a succession of deep plowings, you need not make the hole much larger than the one from which you took the tree. On the contrary, if the soil is hard and soddy the hole must be much larger than the lateral dimensions of the roots of the tree. The object is to have a loose, well-pulverized soil through which the roots may spread. Dig the hole a few inches deeper than the depth you plant the tree, then fill it with fine earth and pack the bottom pretty well, leaving the bottom of the hole slightly convex. It is now ready for the tree. Now cut off all the rag or bruised ends of the roots. If a root is broken, cut it off cleanly just above the fracture as a surgeon would amputate a mangled or broken finger. When this is done put the tree into the hole, spread the roots in their natural order over the bottom surface, the convexity of which will give the roots a slightly downward inclination, be very careful in arranging the fibrous roots, the larger ones will almost take care of themselves, now cover with a few inches of moist surface soil and pack and tamp it down firmly about the roots with your hands—the man who would use his boot for this purpose cannot raise trees. You have now about three inches of nice fine soil well tamped around the roots of your tree—there are no open spaces or vacuum about the roots, but everything is firm and well packed. Then empty a pail of rain water into the hole, and allow the same sufficient time to be absorbed by the soil. Now put on a few inches more of fine earth and then tramp it until you have tramped it enough—then tramp it more, but mind and don't let your big cow-hides touch the bark about the trunk of the tree or you'll skin it. Continue this process until you have the soil well rounded up about your tree. Don't spare the tramping. The great secret of success is the enclosing of the roots by the earth. Do not use very much water in planting your trees, never use enough to make a mortar of the soil, for when the soil dries and hardens it will crack and draw away from the roots and leave a vacuum or open space and the confined air will form a mould and rot the roots. Your tree is now planted. The next consideration is the trimming of the branches. This may or may not be necessary. In this matter you must be governed by the circumstances of each case. If the tree has a full supply of roots and a moderate supply of branches you need not trim, but if the roots are meagre, trim in proportion, always bearing in mind that the roots are the suppliers and the trunk and branches the consumers. Do not trim your evergreens unless you are obliged to do so; but if you do trim them, immediately apply a little grafting wax to the wound, it takes but little time and is not expensive, fifty cents worth will be sufficient for six hundred ordinary trees. In this State the walnut is inclined to bush or branch to such an extent that we are obliged to keep it constantly trimmed and in no case should you cut off a branch from a walnut without applying the wax to the fresh wound. If you fail in this the tree will bleed or run its sap gradually during the year, and beneath the wound you will in the course of a few years observe the bark and wood rotted away, besides the walnut has a large, open pith, which will take in the rain and rot unless closed and protected by the wax or some other impervious substance.

And now a few hasty words about the varieties to plant. For hasty shelter and fuel, cottonwood. For shade, shelter and ornament, box elder. The wood of the latter is not worth much. For general utility, ash. I believe the ash is the greatest staple tree for Nebraska. When

properly cultivated it is of reasonably rapid growth and when six or eight inches in diameter is worth money. The hard maple will not grow here, it is a narrow-minded, bigoted tree and unsuited to the spirit of our western institutions. The soft maple cannot be depended upon. It is a fast liver, makes too much splash in the beginning, puts on too much style for its means and becomes bankrupt in a few years. The elm is a noble tree and does well here. The walnut is sure if properly attended to. It is of rather slow growth, but when it has attained a respectable size is valuable. Plant walnut trees and it will be money in your pocket long years after you are dead—plant lots of them and your widow's second husband will bless your memory.

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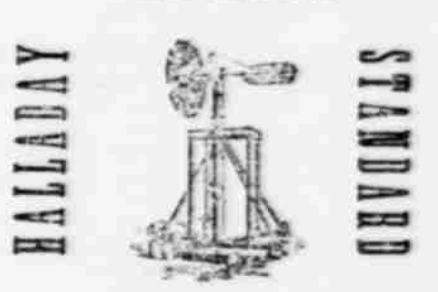
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