

A look back 50 years to 1959:

Thinning Peaches

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Fruit thinning on peach trees is a slow and expensive job and since chemical thinning results have been far from satisfactory. Most Massachusetts growers must resort to hand or club thinning.

The correct thinning distance depends on the leaf area per fruit and the general vigor of the tree. Research has shown that it takes about 40 healthy leaves of average size to produce a peach of good size and quality. When a tree has a uniformly heavy set of fruit, it should be thinned so as to leave only one peach to every six to seven inches of twig. However, if the set is not uniform, it is best to thin according to leaf area rather than a fixed spacing.

As a commercial practice it is suggested that the grower wait till after the June drop is over before starting to thin. At this time, the extent of the thinning job can be best determined. For the best benefits, thinning should be completed as rapidly as possible; the early maturing varieties being thinned first. Some benefits may be expected from thinning even if it is prolonged until a few weeks before harvest.

With a number of Massachusetts growers, hand thinning is the usual practice. The surplus fruit are rubbed off, picking out small and damaged fruit as the thinning is done. However, this is a slow and expensive job and because of this some growers resort to club thinning or removing excess fruit with a stick. Club thinning consists simply of knocking the peaches off with a club. The clubs are prepared by placing a rubber hose (approximately 12 inches in length) over

one end of a four or five foot section of bamboo, broom handle, or other light wood. Some growers use a piece of 3/4 inch spray hose, about fifteen inches long, which is forced over the end of the pole leaving about eight to ten inches of the hose extended beyond the end of the pole. The peaches are knocked off by striking the branch with the padded end of the club. The fruit that would normally fall during the June drop and those not firmly attached will be eliminated.

The remaining clusters and doubles of fruits can be further thinned by striking the unwanted fruit. It is necessary in thinning to avoid hitting any specimens that are to be left. Fruits can be scarred and badly damaged by clumsy and inaccurate use of the club. With practice, the average workman can become quite efficient with the club, and damage to remaining fruit can be kept at a minimum. Some growers find it advantageous to do a "rough job" with the club and complete the job with hand thinning.

Other growers feel that thinning fruits by jarring the limbs with a heavy club is a somewhat haphazard process since there is no selection of the position and vigor of the fruits removed. They prefer to use small sticks to brush-off unwanted fruits. The peaches upon the upper side of a twig are somewhat more likely to develop good color than those upon the underside. With a sweeping stroke of the stick the fruits on the lower sides of the limb can be removed. The remaining clusters and doubles "thinned-out" by striking the unwanted fruits with the stick.

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