

WORK FOR THE COMING MONTH.

THE ORCHARD.

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HANDLING THE STONE-FRUIT CROP.

THE fruit season of 1916-17 is just commencing, cherries and apricots from the earlier districts being now on the market. The early varieties of peaches will soon be available; other classes and varieties of stone-fruits follow in quick succession, and by the end of December the stone-fruit crop will be well under way.

What the successful handling of a large stone-fruit crop means in care and labour can only be thoroughly appreciated by those who have been called upon to carry out the task. It can safely be said that no part of an orchardist's work calls for more energy, forethought, and a greater nicety of judgment than is required in successfully handling and marketing a crop of this kind, particularly when the market served is a distant one.

Peaches that have to travel a distance, besides being well packed, must also be in the proper state of maturity. If insufficiently mature when picked the fruit will either shrivel or fail to mature satisfactorily. A good deal of this class of fruit is marketed every season. In consequence many of the peaches on sale in Wellington and elsewhere are as unlike the real thing as possible, and serve to create a very false impression as to the real quality of the fruit produced in many of our peach-growing districts. On the other hand, if the fruit is overmature when packed it has a very poor chance of reaching the market in anything like a satisfactory condition. Ripe fruit should not be packed unless it is intended for immediate use.

At precisely what stage of maturity peaches should be picked depends to a great extent upon the conditions of marketing. It is here where the judgment and experience of the grower come in. Appearance is the main guide. Each fruit should be full and plump, and showing a fair amount of colour according to the variety, but still firm and hard when required for forwarding to a distance.

Peaches swell rapidly during the few days prior to ripening, a considerable change taking place from day to day. This, as the