

# PACKING APPLES

**A**PPLE packing requires considerable patience and skill and a great deal of practice. The many factors which contribute toward a neat, sound pack are outlined in this article by R. I. June, Orchard Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Hastings, which should be of assistance to those about to learn or to packers who are not satisfied with their present performances, as well as offering advice to growers and shed managers who are responsible for the production of well-packed cases.

**W**ITH prospects of a greater export programme, special attention should be given to packing as protection for the fruit during the long journey and frequent handling. To land this commodity on overseas markets in the best possible condition is in growers' interests, and only if cases are packed properly can this aim be achieved.

## Importance of Correct Tuition

To the beginner tuition from an experienced packer is very important. Trying to learn by observation only is a great mistake, as a style that is slow, cumbersome, and very difficult to alter may be adopted. An incorrect style of apple wrapping can make the work slower, more difficult, and much more tiring, as many unnecessary movements may be made. The would-be packer should not try to gain speed until the wrapping and placing of the fruit has become a natural movement. Speed comes only with practice, and the beginner must not be impatient, as that will only retard his progress.

A packer usually picks up the paper with the right hand, passes the fruit with the left, and places it in the box with the right hand. If possible, a tutor and pupil should be either both left-handed or both right-handed; otherwise it is difficult for the pupil to follow the correct movements and for the teacher to pick his faults.

## Types of Equipment

A packer should feel comfortable at his work and equipment should be adjusted to suit each person.

The height of the packing stand and paper holder is very important; an inch or two either too high or too low can make a good deal of difference to a day's output and to the strain on the packer. The bottom of the box should be at least 2ft. from the floor, making the top about 2ft. 11in. high. A tall person may require the bottom of the box to be 2ft. 2in. or even 2ft. 3in. from the floor; if the stand were any higher, the case would be too far above



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the bins and each fruit would have to be lifted before it could be passed across to the hand holding the paper, slowing down the packing operation considerably. If when the packer is standing upright the fingers will just touch the bottom of the case at the lower end, it is in a position which will cause least strain.

Having the bins reasonably high—about 36in.—to suit tall people is an advantage, because the floor can be built up to suit those who are not so tall. The tops of most machines are between 34 and 36in. from the floor.

The packing stand should be firm. The case should rest on it only at the ends, allowing the bottom to bulge as packing proceeds. The case should rest in a sloping position with the raised end 3 to 4in. higher and away from the packer.

The stand should be made so that the side of the case touches the bin when the case is in position. It should be made with a simple and quick adjustment to accommodate left- or right-handed packers. Stands on castors have the advantages that they may be placed according to the liking of the packer and rolled to the conveyer when the pack is completed, thus necessitating only a short lift to place the case on the conveyer leading to the nailing-down bench. Unfortunately this type is not suited to an uneven floor. Stands fitted to a slide on the side of the sizing machine should be well fitted to allow them to slide easily.

The rack or tray which holds the wrapping paper should be well made and firmly secured. Swivel-type racks built into the packing stand are most

suitable, as they may be swung out of the way when the apple case is being moved or to let another person pass. Another type of rack often used clips on to the side of the case being packed, but it has some disadvantages: Its weight, especially when it is well filled with paper, tends to tip the case sideways, so that it has to be held with the body until the weight of the fruit placed in the case holds it firmly; in many cases the rack must be removed to allow other packers and workers to pass up the packing aisle; and a place has to be allowed for the rack while the full case is being removed. However, if this type of rack is used, it should be made so that the paper is level and not sloping at the same angle as the case being packed, otherwise the paper tends to slew around and becomes difficult to pick up.

To allow the paper to be picked up easily it is important that the needle point on the spring- or weight-loaded holder be sharp. It should be renewed at frequent intervals. When the needle becomes dull the paper will not tear away freely from the point and small pieces of paper tend to build up under the needle, making it difficult to pull the wraps free; then the needle must be lifted and the torn-out pieces removed at frequent intervals, thus slowing up the work and putting a strain on the hand. Correct spring tension to hold the paper firmly is also important. Suitable spring holders have not been available for some time, but are now on the market. However, a satisfactory fitting to hold a gramophone needle can be made quite easily.