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Peanuts for Oil

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According to E. T. Batten, superintendent of the Holland experiment station, who supervises the peanut experiments at the Holland, Williamsburg and Petersburg stations, farmers who are going to increase their acreage of peanuts, and those who are going to grow them for the first time, should consider thoroughly certain basic production facts. Mr. Batten has drawn the following conclusions after many years of experimentation, farming and observation:

Varieties.—On the dark, heavy types of soil of the Tidewater section the small Virginia Runner and the Small or Carolina Bunch is recommended. Runner seed from Georgia, Florida and Alabama are also satisfactory for the Tidewater section. For all other adapted sections of Virginia, one of the following Spanish strains should be used: 2-B, X-L-2, or 18-38. Do not plant Valencia (Red Ripper) or Tennessee Red, as they are more susceptible to sclerotium wilt than the white-skinned varieties.

Seed.—Nothing but quality seed should be planted. After shelling the seed, remove all inferior and damaged kernels. Whether shelled by hand or with a machine, cracking the seed or breaking the outer skin will lower germination. Peanuts shelled by machine should be planted without delay.

Inoculation.—Even on soil on which peanuts have been grown for years, profitable results have been obtained from inoculating peanut seed. For instance, at the Holland Experiment Station inoculation has given an average increased yield of 200 pounds of nuts per acre. It is even more important to inoculate peanut seed in sections where they are being grown for the first time.

Seedbed Preparation.—Prepare the soil as for any other crop, being sure to kill all weeds and grass by harrowing just before planting. Virginia types may be planted from May 1 to the first week in June; while Spanish types may be planted as late as July 1. Early planting is always more satisfactory. For most satisfactory planting of the Virginia types, peanut planters should be used; for Spanish types, a corn planter may be used if proper plates are provided.

Virginias are planted in rows 30 to 36 inches apart and spaced 9 to 16 inches in the drill. Spanish peanuts are planted in rows 24 to 36 inches apart, and spaced 6 to 12 inches in the drill. Do not cover the seed more than 1½ inches and do not place them more than 3 inches below the surface.

Lime.—Use sufficient lime to bring the soil reaction to a pH of 5.8 to 6.2. If the soil needs but does not receive lime, 300 pounds per acre of Gypsum applied about the middle of July will help.

Fertilizer.—Use 400 pounds of 0-12-12 fertilizer per acre on light sandy soils and 500 pounds of 0-14-6 on heavy clay soils. Mix the fertilizer thoroughly with the soil in the row, about one week before planting the peanuts,

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or apply it on top of the row just as the plants break through the ground.

Cultivation.—Start cultivating as soon as the plants begin to emerge. It does not hurt to cover the young plants with soil, since they will emerge again quickly. Early cultivation makes it possible to smother the young grass and weeds and is essential, since close cultivation is impossible, except with a hoe, after the plants increase in size. Runner types are left on a slightly rounded ridge at the last cultivation, and Bunch and Spanish types are left on a higher ridge.

Insects and Diseases.—The insect most troublesome in peanut production is the potato leaf hopper, and cercospera leaf spot is the worst disease. Both are effectively controlled by the use of finely ground dusting sulphur. See Virginia Experiment Station Bulletin 316.

Harvesting.—Since peanut pods continue to form over a rather long period and are never all ripe at the same time, some judgment is needed as to the proper time to dig to save the greatest number of marketable nuts. The grower should examine the plants from time to time to make this determination. Usually Spanish types are ready to dig in about 135 days, and Virginias in about 150 days.

A peanut digger does the best job of digging and saves much labor, but the greater part of the peanut crop in Virginia is dug by severing the main root with a turning plow from which the mold board has been removed. The plants are then taken from the ground with a pitchfork and shaken to remove the dirt, allowed to dry for a few hours, and then put in small stacks around poles to dry. A small slat is nailed to each pole about one foot from the ground to facilitate the movement of air through the stack.

Peanuts for oil may be left on the ground for several days before stacking. Handled this way, they dry more rapidly, and the hull becomes darker, but the latter is of no importance when the crop is to be used for oil.

Picking.—The old method of picking the nuts from the vines by hand is out of the question now. With any size crop a machine picker is essential.

For more detailed information, consult a member of your County Agricultural Board, your County War Board, or your County Agent.

VIRGINIA EXTENSION SERVICE

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