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Easier Faster Better Ways to Pick Apples

Michigan State University Extension Service

H.P. Gaston, MSU Department of Horticulture, 1946; revised 1981 by D. H. Dewey,
MSU Professor of Horticulture

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Easier Faster Better Ways To Pick **APPLES**

Originally prepared by H.P. Gaston, MSU Department of Horticulture, 1946; revised 1981 by D. H. Dewey, MSU Professor of Horticulture
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Before You Begin

Dress properly. Your clothes may be old, but they should be cool, comfortable and serviceable. Avoid wearing trousers with cuffs, should you catch your heel in one, it might mean a bad fall from your ladder. Wear a sweater in the morning if it is cool.

Get your equipment. You will need:

- A picking bucket
- A web harness to hold the bucket in front of you and support its weight from your shoulders
- A ladder — long enough to enable you to reach all the fruit in the trees that are assigned to you
- Tickets upon which your name may be written, or some other means of keeping track of the number of units picked, if you are being paid piece-work rates

Get any special instructions from the owner or orchard boss regarding the way to pick, handle and check in the fruit.

Get your row assignment. The orchard boss will tell you where to start. It is usually best to work as a family or with several friends who pick rapidly and well.

Picking . . . Easier

The work will be easier if your harness and picking bucket are properly adjusted. See that the straps are not twisted. The picking container should not hang so low that it will bump your legs as you walk or climb.

In removing apples from the tree, take hold of them as shown

in Fig. 1. Lift to one side and up (Fig. 1A), giving a slight turn as you do so (Fig. 1B).

If the apples come off hard, place the end of your thumb or first finger against the stem at the point where it is attached to the fruit spur or twig. Holding your finger in this way as you twist, will enable you to get the fruit off without pulling stems out of the

apples or breaking fruit spurs off the tree.

Do not stoop, reach or climb when your picking bucket is full or nearly so. Apples are heavy. Empty your picking bucket as soon as it is full.

If you do not have an empty container close to the tree in which you are working, place a bin nearby before you start to

A System Will Pay Off

Most apple pickers are paid on the basis of the amount harvested. Fast workers earn more money.

In almost every apple orchard there are a few outstanding pickers. Without working either harder or longer, these pickers get off two or three times as many apples as the average worker. They earn more money, not because they are stronger or quicker, but because they have a better system.

With a good system, you can:

- Earn more money.
- Make the job easier.
- Do better work.

This Bulletin tells you how.

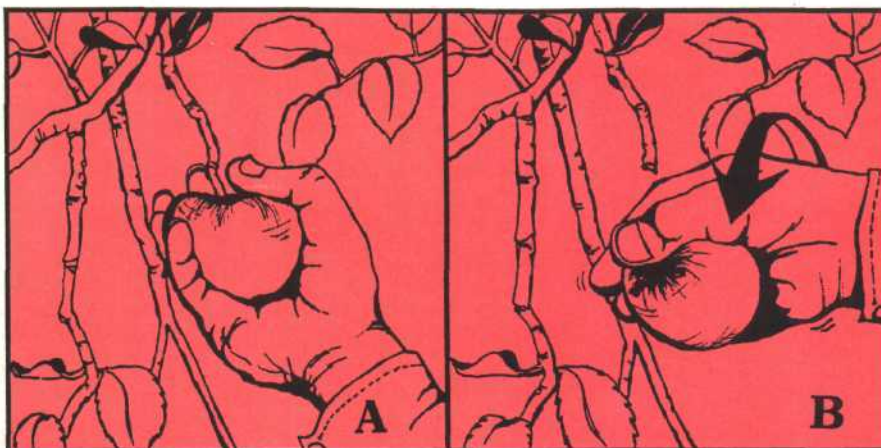


Fig. 1 — To pick an apple, grasp with hand (as shown in A), then lift upward and twist (as in B).

pick. This will be much easier than carrying the fruit to the "empties" if they are located several tree rows away.

Don't overdo the first day.

Picking . . . Faster

Work with hands close together and in front of you (Fig. 2). They do the most work and make you the most money when used in this position. Make sure that your left hand really works.

Start picking from the ground. First take the highest apples that are within easy reach. As the branches are relieved of the weight of this fruit they will lift many low-hanging apples up to a point where they can be reached without stooping.

Do not set your ladder and commence at the top until all the apples you can reach without using it have been harvested.

Pick clean as you go. If you are "stripping" the trees, get all the fruit. If you are "spot picking," take every apple that has reached the proper stage of maturity.

Doing so makes it unnecessary to go back for fruit you have missed.

Glance ahead as you work. When your hands are placing apples in the bucket, your eyes should be selecting the fruit that you will pick next.

Avoid reaching too far. Long reaches from the ground slow you down. Attempting a long reach from the ladder may cause a bad fall.

Do not hold a branch with one hand and pick with the other one. This practice cuts the amount of fruit you can pick almost in half.

Emptying your picking bucket — walking to where the fruit is being left — takes time. A half-filled bag should be emptied only when failing to do so means climbing, stooping or walking to the next tree with a partially filled (heavy) container.

Picking . . . Better

Be sure you understand where you are to start, and how the fruit is to be picked and handled. Do

not be afraid to ask questions if you are in doubt.

If the trees are to be gone over several times, the orchard boss will show you the stage of maturity at which to pick the apples. Pick only those that have reached the proper size and color.

Do not pull branches toward you as you work. The wood is brittle and easily broken.

Don't pull stems out of the apples as you pick. Rot organisms are almost sure to enter at the break in the skin. Tearing out its stem makes even a fancy apple a cull.

Do not drop apples into your picking bucket. Place them in with reasonable care on the bottom of the bucket, or on the fruit it contains, if partially full.

Do not pull fruit spurs off the tree along with the apples. Material of this sort looks bad and is likely to cut or bruise the fruit with which it comes in contact. Apples are borne year after year by the same fruit spurs. Leave the spurs on the tree so that they may bear again.

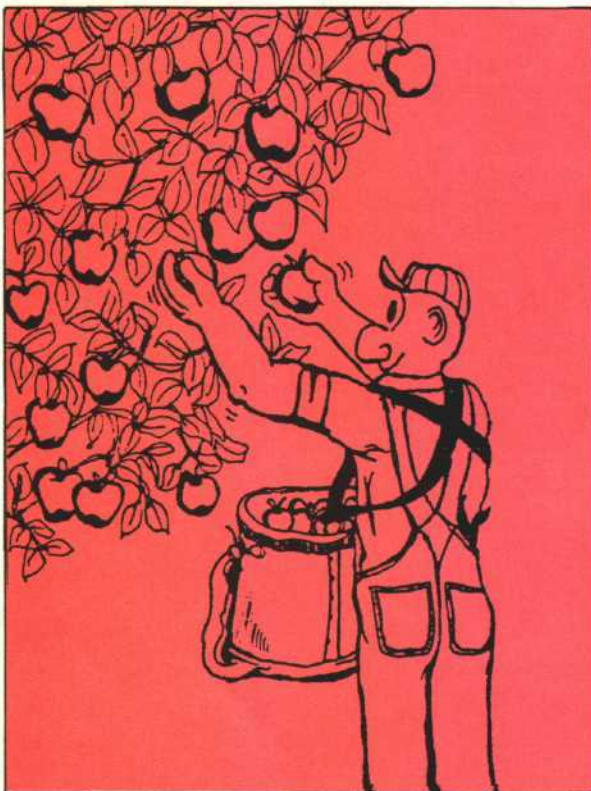


Fig. 2 — Always pick directly in front of you with both hands.



Fig. 3 — The apples should flow easily without falling from the bucket into the bin.

Apples bruise easily. Empty your picking bucket with care. Much damage can be prevented if you lower the bag into the bin with care. Let the apples flow out without falling or bumping, as shown in Fig. 3.

Keep the fruit fairly level in all corners of the bin during filling. Do not push or drag the apples to the corners; instead, let the apples flow to a different area each time you empty the picking bucket. Fill the bins level to the top edge of the sides.

The equipment given you in the morning should be checked in at night. Harnesses and picking buckets that are left in the orchard over night may be lost or stolen.

Check yourself constantly to make sure that you are doing the things that make for efficiency and speed.

When the Job is Finished

Stay with the job until the orchard in which you are working is finished. If you have been a good hand and stayed until the end, the grower will be glad to help you find another job. He may be able

to send you to a neighbor where you can start work without delay or to other areas where workers are needed.

Handling Your Ladder

Set your ladder so that it will be solid and safe. You can then keep your balance easily and pick rapidly.

A ladder in a rather upright position (Fig. 4) is less likely to slip off the branch that supports it. Set your ladder so that if it does slide off the supporting branch, it will fall into the tree and not to the ground.

To keep your ladder from slipping, press its legs into the soil by bearing your weight on the first rung close to each leg in turn.

See that your ladder does not lean to right or left as you face it. On level ground this is easy. On a side hill it may be necessary to "kick" a hole in the ground for the leg on the uphill side. Placing the leg in such a hole allows it to drop to the level of the other one; it makes a safe, upright set.

Place your ladder so that you can reach the greatest possible

amount of fruit. Reset as often as necessary to keep fruit within easy reach, but avoid making more moves than you have to.

Set your ladder carefully. Do not let it fall into the tree and damage fruit. In working your ladder into a narrow opening, turn one edge towards the tree as it is being moved into place.

Don't climb your ladder on the center section of the rungs. They are inclined to be weak and may break. Place your feet on the rungs near the points at which they fit into and are supported by the side rails.

Don't let the fruit in your picking bag bump against the rungs of your ladder as you climb up or down.

In making short moves keep the ladder upright (Fig. 4). Move it by grasping two rungs about three or four feet apart.

For longer moves, hold the ladder at the balance point and carry it horizontally on your shoulder.

Never let your ladder fall. Ladders break easily and are hard to replace.

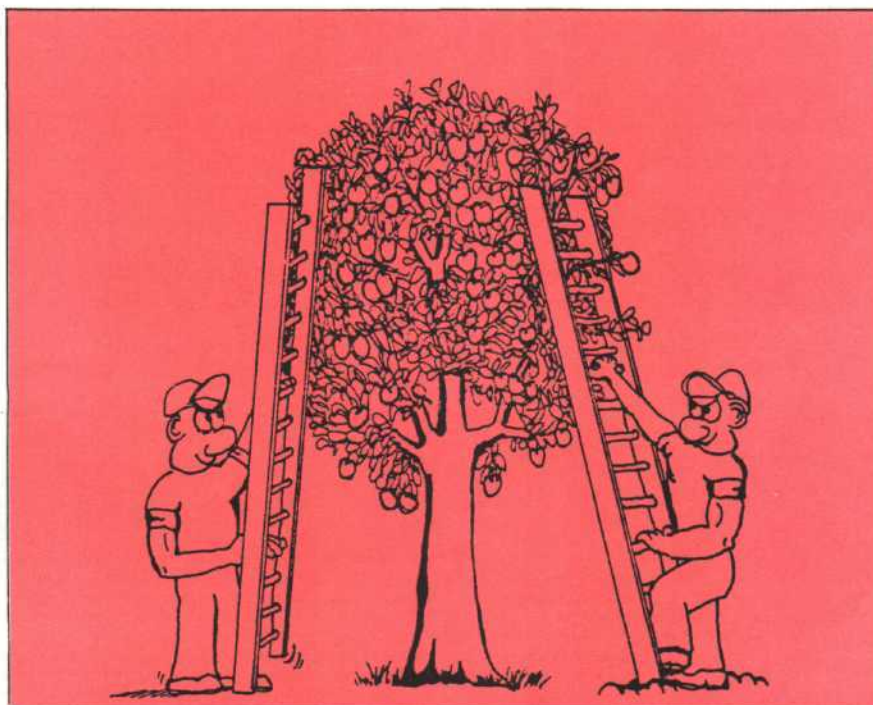


Fig. 4 — Keep ladders upright when making short moves.

Suggestions to the Boss

Remember that the pickers look to you for leadership. What they accomplish depends, to a considerable extent, upon how well you do your job. Be sure they have their bins properly located and moved when necessary. Show them that you are interested in their making a good wage as well as doing a good job of picking.

Start beginners right by teaching them the most important things first. In doing so, follow these four steps:

1. Tell them.
2. Show them.
3. Try them out.
4. Put them on their own.

Encourage inexperienced workers. Make them feel that they are doing an important job. Praise good work.

Don't spend all your time with beginners. Show experienced workers who are already doing a good job how they can do even better.

Be enthusiastic.

Move about the orchard. See and speak to every picker at least occasionally. Answer questions cheerfully. Encourage workers to make suggestions.

Maintain discipline. Be fair and reasonable, but be firm. Do not allow pickers to throw apples or in other ways bother those who want to work.

Keep your temper.

Suggestions to the Owner

Provide good supervision. A well-directed crew means more profits for you and higher wages for the help. Either do this important job yourself or hire a good foreman.

Promote a pleasant atmosphere. A cheerful crew will do more work and make more money for both themselves and their employer than will a sullen, unhappy one.

Provide picking buckets and

ladders of good design. See that they are in good repair and so placed that workers can get them quickly and easily.

Provide and place empty containers as needed. Locate bins so that workers are never required to walk more than a short distance to get them. When pickers move to another tree or group of trees, have their partially filled bins moved with them promptly.

Provide those who are doing piece work with some means of keeping track of the amount picked.

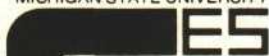
Provide plenty of cool and conveniently located drinking water.

Provide adequate separate toilet facilities for both men and women.

Explain carefully the system of keeping track of the number of units picked. This will help avoid mistakes, delay and dissatisfaction.

Have a definite understanding as to when and how pickers are to be paid.

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