

READING 19-2

Source: Cato, (M.P.) *On Agriculture*. 1934 Harvard University Press, Cambridge. (W.D. Hooper, translator).

Cato

On Acquiring Farms

I. When you are thinking of acquiring a farm, keep in mind these points: that you be not overeager in buying nor spare your pains in examining, and that you consider it not sufficient to go over it once. However often you go, a good piece of land will please you more at each visit. Notice how the neighbours keep up their places; if the district is good, they should be well kept. Go in and keep your eyes open, so that you may be able to find your way out. It should have a good climate, not subject to storms; the soil should be good, and naturally strong. If possible, it should lie at the foot of a mountain and face south; the situation should be healthful, there should be a good supply of labourers, it should be well watered, and near it there should be a flourishing town, or the sea, or a navigable stream, or a good and much travelled road. It should lie among those farms which do not often change owners; where those who have sold farms are sorry to have done so. It should be well furnished with buildings. Do not be hasty in despising the methods of management adopted by others. It will be better to purchase from an owner who is a good farmer and a good builder. When you reach the steading, observe whether there are numerous oil presses and wine vats; if there are not, you may infer that the amount of the yield is in proportion. The farm should be one of no great equipment, but should be well situated. See that it be equipped as economically as possible, and that the land be not extravagant. Remember that a farm is like a man-however great the income, if there is extravagance but little is left. If you ask me what is the best kind of farm, I should say: a hundred iugera of land, comprising all sorts of soils, and in a good situation; a vineyard comes first if it produces bountifully wine of a good quality; second, a watered garden; third, an osier-bed; fourth an olive yard; fifth, a meadow; sixth, grain land; seventh, a wood lot; eighth, an arbustum; ninth, a mast grove.

Fertilization

XXXVI. Fertilizers for crops: Spread pigeon dung on meadow, garden, and field crops. Save carefully goat, sheep, cattle, and all other dung. Spread or pour amurca around trees, an amphora to the larger, an urn to the smaller, diluted with half its volume of water, after running a shallow trench around them.

Propagation Techniques (grafting, cuttage, and layerage)

XLI. Vine grafting may be done in the spring or when the vine flowers, the former time being best. Pears and apples may be grafted during the spring, for fifty days at the time of the summer solstice, and during the vintage; olives and figs should be grafted during the spring. Graft the vine as follows: Cut off the stem you are grafting, and split the middle through the pith; in it insert the sharpened shoots you are grafting, fitting pith to pith. A second method is: If the vines touch each other, cut the ends of a young shoot of each obliquely, and tie pith to pith with bark. A third method is: With an awl bore a hole through the vine which you are grafting, and fit tightly to the pith two vine shoots of whatever variety you wish, cut obliquely. Join pith to pith, and fit them into the perforation, one on each side. Have these shoots each two feet long; drop them to the ground and bend them back toward the vine stock, fastening the middle of the vine to the ground with forked sticks and covering with dirt. Smear all these with the kneaded mixture, tie them up and protect them in the way I have described for olives.

XLII. Another method of grafting figs and olives is: Remove with a knife the bark from any variety of fig or olive you wish, and take off a piece of bark containing a bud of any variety of fig you wish to graft. Apply it to the place you have cleared on the other variety, and make it fit. The bark should be three and a half fingers long and three fingers wide. Smear and protect as in the other operation.

XLV. Cut olive slips for planting in trenches three feet long, and when you chop or cut them off, handle them carefully so as not to bruise the bark. Those which you intend to plant in the nursery should be cut one foot long, and planted in the following way: The bed should be turned with the trenching spade until the soil is finely divided and soft. When you set the slip, press it in the ground with the foot; and if it does not go deep enough, drive it in with a mallet or maul, but be careful not to break the bark in so doing. Do not first make a hole with a stick, in which to set out the slip. It will thrive better if you plant it so that it stands as it did on the tree. The slips are ready for transplanting at three years, when the bark turns. If you plant in trenches or furrows, plant in groups of three, and spread them apart. Do not let them project more than four finger-widths above the ground; or you may plant the eyes.

LI. Layering of fruit trees and other trees: Press into the earth the scions which spring from the ground around the trees, elevating the tip so that it will take root. Then two years later dig up and transplant them. Fig, olive, pomegranate, quince, and all other fruit trees, laurel, myrtle, Praenestine nuts, and planes should all be layered, dug, and transplanted in the same way.

LII. When you wish to layer more carefully you should use pots or baskets with holes in them, and these should be planted with the scion in the trench. To make them take root while on the tree, make a hole in the bottom of the pot or basket and push the branch which you wish to root through it. Fill the pot or basket with dirt, trample thoroughly, and leave on the tree. When it is two years old, cut off the side and through the bottom, or, if it is a pot, break it, and plant the branch in the trench with the basket or pot. Use the same method with a vine, cutting it off the next year and planting it with the basket. You can layer any variety you wish in this way.

Instructions for Female Housekeepers

CXLIII. See that the housekeeper performs all her duties. If the master has given her to you as wife, keep yourself only to her. Make her stand in awe of you. Restrain her from extravagance. She must visit the neighbouring and other women very seldom, and not have them either in the house or in her part of it. She must not go out to meals, or be a gad-about. She must not engage in religious worship herself or get others to engage in it for her without the orders of the master or the mistress; let her remember that the master attends to the devotions for the whole household. She must be neat herself, and keep the farmstead neat and clean. She must clean and tidy the hearth every night before she goes to bed. On the Kalends, Ides, and Nones, and whenever a holy day comes, she must hang a garland over the hearth, and on those days pray to the household gods as opportunity offers. She must keep a supply of cooked food on hand for you and the servants. She must keep many hens and have plenty of eggs. She must have a large store of dried pears, sorbs, figs, raisins, sorbs in must, preserved pears and grapes and quinces. She must also keep preserved grapes in grape-pulp and in pots buried in the ground, as well as fresh Praenestine nuts kept in the same way, and Scantian quinces in jars, and other fruits that are usually preserved, as well as wild fruits. All these she must store away diligently every year. She must also know how to grind spelt fine.