

PLUCKING AND THE ADVANTAGES OF SLOPES

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When a tea bush is pruned, and has put on new foliage, it is tipped to a height of 6"-8" from the prune cut depending on the lie of the land, height, slope, *etc.* to form the next plucking table. A careful supervision of tipping will, no doubt, improve the development and formation of the frame. The weak and debilitated bushes should not be plucked until there are sufficient branches to form the frame-work of the bush, and careful supervision, especially during the early rounds of tipping should be maintained, so that the bush could build up and withstand the numerous "picks" before it is pruned again. Each bush should be treated strictly on its own merit.

The important points to be remembered with regard to plucking are given below :

1. No stripping or plucking below the plucking surface or in hollows;
2. All side braches to be left untouched in order to develop and produce a greater plucking surface ;
3. All tender banjies at the level to be collected each round, and the buds and immature flush to be left untouched. This will stimulate growth and prevent coarse leaf ;
4. All weak and defoliated bushes to be left unplucked for a short period ;
5. To break back overgrown shoots, *etc* each round;
6. Preserve a reasonable slope as far as possible;
7. To pluck to a full leaf above the "Fish Leaf", or "Karuppu Kattalai" in China bushes ;
8. Maintain at least five picks in VP tea and four picks in Seed tea per month, depending on growth.

Stripping, plucking in hollows and side branches will result in an immediate increase in yield, but the yield will fall-off gradually, as the reduction in foliage will restrict the food supply and in the end, produce defoliated and weak bushes. To maintain high standards, close supervision should be carried out in the plucking fields by all concerned.

Slope Plucking :

When slope plucking was first introduced to our estates, as a young S.D., I was opposed to this system as it meant a sawing-off of the lower frames built-up over the years. Then, gradually, with experience I found that slope plucking was advantageous in many ways. When the tea bushes are plucked and tipped at a slope parallel to the lie of the land,

the side branches, if left untouched, tend to grow faster resulting in a neat appearance and exposing the entire surface to the direct rays of the sun. With slope plucking, the points are numerous and no crop is wasted. With a good cover of tea and even slopes the weed growth is less and there is a check on soil erosion as well. There is one school of thought which believes that slope plucking yields tend to drop, but it is my experience that with reasonable slopes and a high standard of supervision in the plucking fields, yield increases provided, of course, that the weather is favourable and fertilizer is applied when necessary. All other factors being equal, slope plucking gives that extra bit of stimulation by assisting photosynthesis which helps to increase the yield.