A guide to the harvesting of plums for export - Part - 2

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THE Santa Rosa is an important export plum variety. It is the earliest of the main varieties shipped to Singapore and under proper conditions of harvesting and handling it carries well. It is, however, necessary to give close attention to harvest maturity to ensure that the fruit will arrive in the best possible condition.

To assist growers to judge the correct picking maturity, the accompanying colour plate has been prepared showing the various stages through which the Santa Rosa passes during the ripening process. These changes which consist of a gradual yellowing of the green colour and an accompanying increase in red colour provide a definite means of assessing maturity, and can be used very effectively as a guide to harvesting. The first sign of maturity is the appearance of a dull red colour usually on the tip and suture of the plum as shown in Stage 2. As ripening continues the green ground colour develops a yellowish tinge while the red progressively diffuses through the skin until the whole fruit is tinged with red as in Stage 5. The colour then gradually deepens until when fully ripe the fruit is dark red as shown in Stage 8.

Santa Rosas in exposed positions on the tree, which will be the first harvested, develop more red colour than fruit in more sheltered situations so that for early pickings the plums will have a much higher colour than later in the season. In later pickings changes in the ground colour are more evident and must be taken into account in assessing maturity.

For early pickings, fruit should be selected between Stages 4 and 5, whereas later in the season the colour should tend towards Stages 3 and 4. Where plums up to Stage 5 of maturity are being packed care is necessary to ensure that the fruit is not overmature, that is the skin completely free from any deep red colouration, no evidence whatsoever of softening and no pink tinge in the flesh.

Santa Rosas increase in size considerably as the fruit matures and an increase of \( \frac{1}{4} \) in. diameter can occur between successive pickings. This is a further advantage in delaying harvesting until the correct stage of maturity is reached.

Apart from harvesting at the right stage it is important to pick during the cooler part of the day, handle the fruit as soon as possible and cool store it promptly. Where long transportation before shipment is involved the fruit should be thoroughly cooled before despatch.
SANTA ROSA—Stages of Ripening

1.—Immature green; 2.—Initial blush; 3.—25% red; 4.—75% red; 5.—Tinge of red over most of surface; 6.—Light red; 7.—Bright red; 8.—Dark red
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