

Old Home pear trees show

Resistance to Decline

when on own roots

Pear tree decline has become one of the greatest problems of the California pear industry. Symptoms of the disorder include small, sparse, light green leaves, little or no shoot growth, early cessation of fruit growth, wilting, scorching, and death of leaves. The trees may quickly collapse and die or they may linger for an indefinite period.

In Oregon and Washington most trees on Old Home intermediate stocks have been developed on domestic pear—*Pyrus communis*—seedling roots. Workers in these states have reported that such trees have not suffered from pear decline if an Old Home root system has developed above the graft union.

The experimental orchard at Davis was the first orchard in California to suffer from a severe attack of pear decline, which became evident during March, 1959. Since its appearance, the disease has killed or seriously weakened a large percentage of the pear trees.

Most of the experimental orchard trees stricken during 1959 were mature commercial varieties on Japanese pear—*Pyrus serotina*—roots with the graft unions near the ground level. Some trees on French seedling—*Pyrus communis*—roots also have been affected. Early in the spring of 1960 younger trees started showing evidence of decline and among

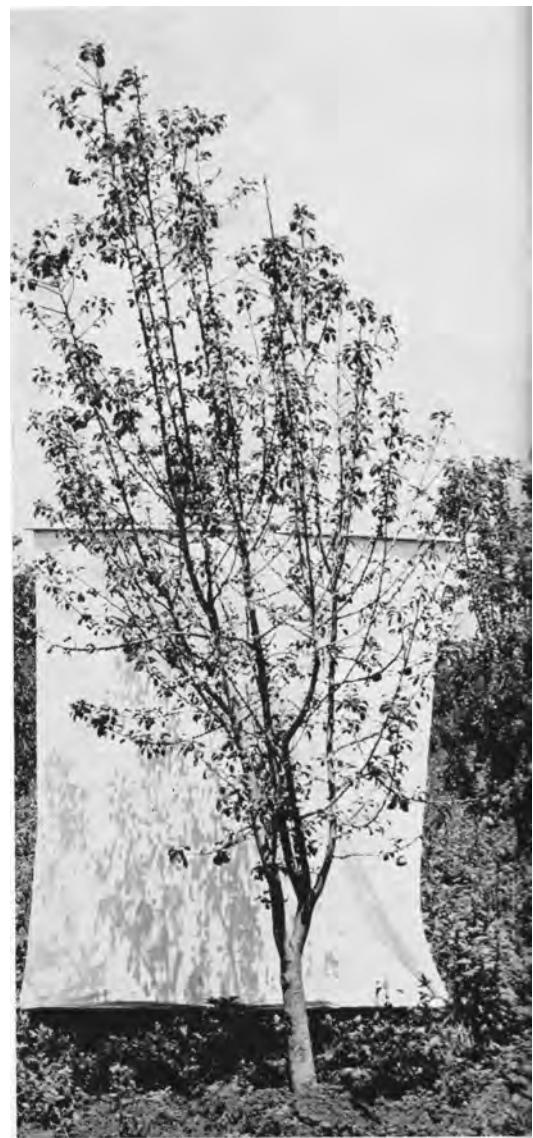
them were a number of Old Home trees with severe symptoms.

Old Home pear has been widely used in California to provide a blight resistant framework—trunk and scaffold system—for Bartlett and other commercial varieties. It has served also as a compatible intermediate stock between quince roots and pear variety tops. Such trees are usually developed by budding Old Home on domestic pear seedlings or rooted quince cuttings. After the Old Home trees have developed an adequate framework, in from two to four years, the trees are top-worked to a commercial pear variety.

The above procedure, using rooted quince cuttings, was followed in producing 216 Old Home trees planted in the experimental orchard at Davis in 1953 to establish a pear variety collection. That combination was used to obtain the dwarfing effect of the quince roots and the blight-resistant factor of the Old Home as an intermediate or body stock. Most of the trees were planted with the bud union near the surface of the ground to prevent the Old Home trunk from developing roots above the bud union and thereby maintain the advantage of the smaller tree. Since 1954, 145 of the 216 experimental trees have been top-grafted to different varieties of pears. In October, 1959, a few of the 71 Old Home trees not top-grafted were showing symptoms of stress and their leaves dropped before those on healthy trees.

All of the 71 Old Home trees appeared normal during April and part of May, 1960, but by early June several were showing symptoms of decline and on June 28, 23 of the trees showed severe decline.

On July 19 the soil was washed away from the roots of five sick trees and five healthy trees by the use of water from a high pressure sprayer. After the roots were washed clean, the walnut-brown bark of Old Home roots and their position above the bud union distinguished them from the blackish-brown quince



Left: Old Home tree showing severe decline, originally propagated on quince.

roots below the union. All of the trees had several quince roots ranging from $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 3" in diameter at points of origin. However, seven of the 10 trees had roots arising from the Old Home tissue above the graft union. The table on this page shows the amount of development of Old Home roots and their relationship to the occurrence of the decline.

Of the trees showing decline symptoms, three had not developed Old Home roots and each of the other two sick trees had only one small root above the union. All of the healthy trees, except one—No. 2-7—had one or more Old Home roots much larger in diameter than any of the quince roots. Tree No. 2-7 had only one

Root Systems of Declining and Healthy Old Home Pear Trees on Quince Roots
Planted in 1953 in Variety Orchard, Davis

Tree	Top-grafted	Tree condition July, 1960	Old Home roots above graft union	
			Number	Diameter at origin
#5-1	No	Severe decline	0	
8-15	Diehl	Dead	0	
9-1	No	Severe decline	1	1" (damaged by disk)
9-5	No	Decline	1	3/4"
9-14	No	Decline	0	
1-7	No	Vigorous*	1	6"
2-7	No	Vigorous*	1	1"
3-6	Hardy	Vigorous	4	1 1/4", 2", 4", 7"
4-3	Winter	Vigorous	2	1 1/2", 7"
9-4	Nelis	Vigorous	1	8"

* A number of vigorous quince suckers were growing from the roots.

Old Home pear

Rootstock Propagated

by hardwood cuttings

Old Home pear—*Pyrus communis*—rootstock can be propagated readily in commercial quantities by hardwood cuttings taken in the fall, treated with IBA—indolebutyric acid—and held under moist storage at 65°–70°F for about three weeks before planting. To take advantage of the Old Home blight-resistant properties, trees can be planted in place in the orchard and, after the trunk and primary scaffold branches are established, top-budded to Bartlett or other fruiting varieties.

Pear trees known to be directly on Old Home roots have not shown, so far, symptoms of pear decline, which first appeared in British Columbia, Washington and Oregon, then later—March 1959—in California. In many instances, Old Home has been used as a pear rootstock by grafting it on quince as an initial nurse root, then planting the tree deeply so that the permanent root system develops from roots arising from the Old Home stock.

Preliminary studies in 1957 showed that after certain growth regulator applications to hardwood cuttings of Old Home, followed by pre-planting warm storage treatments, rooting could be obtained in commercially useful percentages. Further tests with hardwood cuttings of Old Home and Bartlett pear were conducted during the 1959–60 season. The Bartlett variety was included in the rooting tests because—if the pear decline trouble involves a graft union disorder—Bartlett trees propagated on their own roots might be a means of overcoming the disease.

Hardwood cuttings of Old Home and Bartlett varieties were made from previous season's shoots collected on November 16 and December 15, 1959, and on January 15, 1960. The cuttings were prepared by tying the shoots, mostly $\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter, into bundles of about 100 sticks each and sawing them to an 8" length with a band saw. The smaller terminal growth and larger basal sections were discarded.

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roots, the cuttings were removed from the boxes and planted in the nursery row. Treatment 3, tried only with the cuttings collected November 16, was intended to provide relatively high temperatures—about 70°F—at the base of the cuttings, to stimulate root formation, while holding the buds at the top of the cuttings under the normal winter-chilling conditions.

Before planting, the soil was prepared to a depth of about 10" with a rototiller. In Treatment 1, the 8" cuttings were inserted in the soil by hand, leaving about 1" of the cutting exposed. In Treatments 2 and 3, where callus had developed and, in some instances, root protuberances, a trench was dug and the cuttings carefully put in place to the same depth for each treatment.

On July 5, 1960, counts were made of the cuttings which had developed into vigorous nursery trees. Best rooting of Old Home pear cuttings occurred when they were taken in mid-November, treated with IBA at 200 ppm, held in damp peat moss at 65°–70°F for about three weeks, then planted. Cuttings taken December 15 and January 15 also rooted but in lower percentages. A concentration of 200 ppm of IBA consistently gave higher percentages of rooting than either



Root system produced by the Old Home pear nursery trees. July 19, 1960.

100 ppm or 300 ppm. No untreated controls were used in these tests because earlier studies had demonstrated that without the IBA treatment no rooting occurred.

The relatively high pre-planting temperatures in Treatment 2 probably stimulated development of root initials much more rapidly than the lower temperatures occurring in the soil at the time of year

the cuttings were made. This undoubtedly accounted for the good results obtained with this treatment.

The 3-week period at 65°F in Treatment 2 did not force the buds into growth because, at the time of year the cuttings were made, the buds would still be in the physiological rest period or they would not have been exposed to enough winter chilling to break the rest influence. The beneficial influence of high temperatures at the base of the cuttings in inducing root formation is also indicated in Treatment 3, where fairly good rooting occurred.

Hardwood cuttings of Bartlett pear proved to be much more difficult to root than those of Old Home. In only two treatments did rooting of Bartlett occur and these were in low percentages. In cuttings collected November 16, treated with IBA at 300 ppm, and held in warm storage for three weeks before planting, only 3% rooting was obtained. Also, in cuttings collected on the same day, treated with IBA at 200 ppm, and held over bottom heat—Treatment 3—for three weeks before planting, only 3% rooting occurred.

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grafted to Winter Nelis and Hardy varieties, had more Old Home roots than the healthy trees which were not top-grafted. Cutting the Old Home trees back prior to top-grafting may stimulate the trunks to develop roots above the union.

In a demonstration orchard at Davis, a number of Old Home trees propagated on either quince or domestic pear seedling roots are planted each year. Early in June, 1960, five of the trees planted from 1953 through 1956, started showing typical symptoms of pear decline. By July 6, three of the trees had severe symptoms of decline and by July 23 they appeared to be dying. On July 6 and 8 the roots of the five sick trees were exposed by washing the soil away with the high pressure sprayer. The roots of five comparable, but healthy, trees were exposed also. The table on this page shows the amount and development of Old Home

roots which had developed above the quince roots and their relation to the health of these trees. All of the trees had several quince roots ranging from 1/2" to 1 1/2" in diameter at their points of origin.

Root Systems of Declining and Healthy Old Home Pear Trees on Quince Roots
Demonstration Orchard, Davis

Tree	Year planted	Tree condition July, 1960	Old Home roots above graft union	
			Number	Diameter at origin
*17-1	1953	Severe decline	0	
17-1	1955	Severe decline	0	
17-6	1955	Decline	1	5/16"
17-7	1955	Severe decline	0	
17-1	1956	Moderate decline	0	
17-8	1953	Vigorous	3	3 1/2", 4", 6 1/2"
17-2	1955	Vigorous	3	1/2", 1 1/2", 3"
17-4	1955	Moderately vigorous	1	1 1/4"
17-8	1955	Moderately vigorous	1	1 1/2"
17-2	1956	Moderately vigorous	1	4"

Four of the five demonstration orchard Old Home trees showing decline had developed no roots above the graft unions. Tree No. 17-6 had developed only one root—the diameter of a pencil—above the union. All healthy trees had developed from one to three Old Home roots above the graft unions. There was an obvious positive correlation between the number and size of the Old Home roots and the size and vigor of the tree.

A few mature Bartlett pear trees, top-worked on Old Home framework growing on French seedling roots, which have succumbed to decline in California have been examined and no roots above the graft union were found. This is further evidence that Old Home is resistant to the pear decline only if it has developed vigorous roots above the graft union.

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