THE PREPARATION OF MATERIAL FOR FIELD CROPS LABORATORY.¹

W. O. Whitcomb,

Montana College of Agriculture, Bozeman, Mont.

INTRODUCTION.

Laboratory work in agriculture in colleges and high schools may be conducted very easily and efficiently when plenty of material is available, but is very unsatisfactory when there is a limited supply of poorly prepared specimens at hand. This is no less true of the work in field crops than in any other phase of agricultural work. A soil laboratory can be made very attractive and be well equipped for student work with a supply of the common soil types and the apparatus which is necessary for studying the various properties of soils, but not so with the field crops laboratory. A crops laboratory should be equipped with well prepared specimens of all the crops to be studied. These should be well labelled and placed in such a way as to make the rooms as attractive as possible. Students will gain a great deal of knowledge of the appearance and nature of plants by merely seeing them displayed for a time. It is well to have some of these specimens so mounted that they may be taken down and used for class work.

A study of this problem has been made at the Montana State College for the past three years, where the growing season is so short that outdoor work during the school year is very limited. This necessitates, as it does in many localities, the fitting up of the laboratory so that a rather complete study of crops may be made indoors.

Many schools are making use of mounted material which is prepared and sold by educational institutions and supply houses. This material, while very good, is unsatisfactory from two standpoints: (1) In many cases the specimens do not meet the local needs, and it is impossible to obtain varieties of local importance; and (2) the distinguishing features of the plants are not always preserved; that is, the leaves and roots are not mounted in the best manner.

¹ Received for publication July 20, 1915.