

EXPERIENCES WITH AVOCADO VARIETIES

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It is desired by our president to have presented at this meeting reports of the results so far obtained with avocado varieties by growers in different localities, and with different soil conditions. My report is that of an orange grower, located in the midst of the citrus belt which surrounds the San Bernardino valley, 38 miles east of Los Angeles, five miles northwest of the railroad station at Upland, and at 2,000 feet elevation above sea level.

The soil is decomposed granite, with good humes content and was also well supplied with boulders, which still remain below the plowing level.

It was 14 years ago when I planted my first avocado tree—a small seedling, obtained from Dr. Franceschi of Santa Barbara. It was planted in an orchard row, between two orange trees, where it stands today, twice the size of the surrounding trees, and bearing abundantly purplish-black, thin skin fruit, good to eat, but too small to be of value. Its hardness is its interesting feature, as it has never been unfavorably affected by adverse weather conditions and stood the remarkable cold of 1912-13 without a particle of harm, which could not be said of adjoining orange and lemon trees.

I have been planting experimentally, from time to time, during the past three years, trees of some 30 different varieties, to test value for a commercial product, very few of them being of the thin skin class. This was not because of the belief that this class will have no future commercial value. I believe it will, but not, I think, with the California varieties so far obtained. Those of them, such as the Northrop, hardy, vigorous, with abundant fruit of fine quality, have their place for household use, solely some think, but the fruit of our thin skin varieties is certainly in most cases of too small an average size and will not pay to market, when the sizes the public like better are to be had in abundance. I believe the right commercial, thin skin kinds are still to arrive, or, rather, are already here for us to discover among California seedlings or imported buds. This claim is sustained by the prices of fruit in the past and of that now on sale. Last week, in the street windows of one of the largest groceries in Los Angeles, the Ganter fruit was for sale under its variety name, tagged at 20 to 25 cents, though some very few, extra large ones were tagged at 40 cents. On this same day, small purple fruit was on sale at 5 cents, and good sized Florida fruit at 50 cents.

The trees of this variety and of the Harman are exceptionally hardy, vigorous and satisfactory, and the Ganter is one of the most prolific varieties, but the fruit of both, in my opinion, has a fatal defect in being so generally subject to cracks, scabs and soft decay spots, that it seems hardly possible it can have any future market value when it comes, in the near future, into competition with other varieties free from these blemishes. I am budding over both varieties.

Among the thick skin varieties which mature their fruit in the spring, summer and fall, we have a number of sufficient merit to seem very sure of being profitable for orchard planting. As yet, we are not so well off in varieties that mature their fruit in the winter, which is the period of highest prices. Most of us are looking forward with the keenest interest toward the discovery of first-class varieties to mature their fruit at this time and watch hopefully the tests of anything which looks promising for this period of the year. One of them is the Puebla. Some trees of this variety matured some fruit in California last winter, which was reported in a letter I received, to have been three-fourths of a pound and over in weight and of fine quality. Such a record we want sustained by similar ones from other trees before planting many Pueblas, but my tree of the variety pleases me greatly. Though planted only two years ago last spring, this Puebla tree now stands nine feet high and ten feet broad, and is carrying 15 fruits, very handsome by reason of their smooth, glossy skin. The tree of the Puebla has a very distinctive individuality. Its short leaf of deep, green color, its stocky, compact growth, and the form it naturally assumes without pruning has reminded many of an apple tree when seeing it at a distance, for the first time. It appears to have ideal characteristics to enable it to carry and protect a crop of fruit.

Another Mexican bud of promise that is beginning to bear in California and produce a large fruit, too large perhaps, is the Grande. My three-year-old tree of this variety, which has made a fairly good growth, blossomed profusely in the spring and set a quantity of fruit, of which one remains and the rest dropped, as usual with young growing trees. The variety promises to be fruitful. My trees of the Dickinson, Fuerte, Challenge and other desirable kinds, are very satisfactory, but not yet in bearing in most cases.

Is it not a decided mistake to continue planting poor growing, delicate kinds, when we can secure vigorous growers with fruit equally good or better? By such a test, we should discard, among others, the Colorado, the Dickey, the Royal and the Presidente. Another one is the Murrieta Green. My two Murrieta trees stood absolutely still for a year and a half, not growing an inch, though since growing quite well, which may or may not continue. I failed to raise the Dickey that I planted and two Colorados, one planted to take the place of the other. My Royal stands the same size as when planted two years ago, and my Presidente is a dwarf tree compared with the others.

For quite an opposite fault the Atlixco (if my tree is true to name), will hardly find a place in our orchards. It is altogether too aspiring and is determined, in spite of the pruner, to send up into the clouds a straight and branchless stem. The Lyon, some think, goes unjustly into the feeble class. It is so precocious and fruitful that it may commit tree-suicide if not restrained. Two of my one-year-old Lyon trees each set three or more dozen fruit this spring. Could they have been anything but feeble if not helped? All but two or three fruits were removed from each tree and the growth has been excellent right along.

Neither do the trees need to take the eucalyptus shape of the parent, at any rate to the same extent, for they submit readily to pruning. For one who will handle it with good sense and wants quick crops of large desirable fruit, the Lyon is not to be overlooked, unless, contrary to my own experience, it proves generally sickly, which some growers state they have found it to be.

A year ago last spring, I began some commercial planting, feeling it fairly safe to use a selection from some of our numerous fine varieties fruiting in the spring, summer and fall. Planting most largely of the first one I shall mention, my choice from those available were the Blakeman, Taft and Sharpless, which begin to mature their fruit consecutively in the order named. All are vigorous trees and good bearers of fruit, first-class in quality and a pound or more in weight.

Those who were present at the Association meeting of a year ago and saw the fruit cut before the audience, will remember the beauty of the Sharpless fruit with its small seed and exceptionally large proportions of cream colored flesh. The growth of the young trees is very slender, but good. The high quality of the Taft fruit is well known. The tree is one of the most beautiful of the avocado family, with its bright red young foliage and good, compact form. It is longer in coming into bearing than many others, but fruitful when it does begin and the tree itself gains by the delay.

The Blakeman, not as yet so well known, comes from a fruit from Atlixco, Mexico, sent by his brother to John Murrieta of Los Angeles, from which the seed was planted at Hollywood. The fruit is pronounced by some of our avocado experts as, at the very least, not excelled in quality by anything we have in the thick skin type and the young trees are certainly vigorous beyond my expectations. Though I am in the habit of heading in and pruning my avocado trees to produce compactness, my Blakeman trees, planted a year ago last April, now stand between 7 and 8 feet in height and broad in proportion. They are larger than any adjacent citrus trees of three or four times their age and are the admiration of my neighbors. They blossomed profusely last spring and set fruit abundantly, which naturally dropped off, as is to be expected of one-year-old trees. The parent tree was planted in 1904; it bore a few fruit in 1913; 25 to 50 in 1914; 250 in 1915, and in 1916 has a good big crop now on the tree.