

NOTES ON THE AVOCADO IN NEW ZEALAND

Geo. A. Green

Dominion Secretary of the New Zealand Institute of Horticulture

It seems strange that a country like New Zealand which has been settled by a European population for nearly a 100 years and has imported and acclimatized trees and plants from every Continent, and from Islands of the Seven Seas, should have neglected the Avocado for so long. There are no records that any Avocados were ever planted in New Zealand till within the last 20 years, and then most of those tried have been seedlings. The general impression seems to have been that the fruit was purely tropical, and therefore, that it was not suitable for the climatic conditions obtaining here.

Californian Experiences—The records, however, of Californian experiences with Mexican varieties and their hybrids seems to have stirred the imagination of the New Zealand State Horticultural Division, and a number of others interested in new plants, and seeds and plants were introduced.

Climate of North New Zealand—The portion of the North Island between latitudes 34° and 40°, within which lies the Citrus Belt (largely on the coast) enjoys a comparative freedom from frost, varying from frost free country to areas where occasional frosts are experienced up to 10° or 12°. It is within this Belt that Avocados are being tried out.

Avocado Trees in New Zealand—Most of the Avocado trees growing in New Zealand are seedlings, the only exceptions being a few trees at Tauranga on the East Coast of the North Island in the late Government Experiment Station, and a few at Wanganui on the West Coast at the Nursery of Mr. A. Allison, and some few trees that he has distributed thereabouts.

Tauranga—As far as can be gathered the trees at Tauranga, imported by the New Zealand Government a number of years ago, are the only ones that have ripened fruit here. The named varieties at Tauranga are "Lyon," "Northrup," "Harmon," and "Meserve." Of these the "Lyon" fruited at 6 years old, and "Northrup" at 9 years old. "Harmon" has blossomed well for the past 4 seasons but has not set any fruit. The other variety has not blossomed yet. Mr. J. H. Davidson, who has charge of them says that though unused to the fruit they are liked by his family, and when dead ripe make very appetizing sandwiches. He reports that the seeds of the "Lyon" were sown and grew; they appear, by foliage, to be identical with the parent. The seedlings, now in the third year, are making excellent growth. Mr. Davidson reports that his trees are growing on light soil, and they have made a wonderful growth. In the young stages manure does not appear to have any effect on the growth one way or the other, but possibly the case would be different when the trees are in full fruit. The soil is a light, warm, sandy loam. The frosts experienced are not more than 4 or 5 degrees and the only variety affected by it has been "Meserve." No disease has been noticed — the only pests have been

thrips, which have been somewhat troublesome.

Wanganui—Mr. A. Allison reports that he has had upwards of 10 years' experience in New Zealand with seedlings of the pure Mexican type, and that he finds that the lighter the soil the better they succeed. At the time of writing (March, 1927) he had several hundred seedlings of the Mexican variety, with one tree now 10 years old, all are doing well, are healthy, and vigorous. The old Mexican seedling has flowered quite freely for several years now. Imported Mexican-Guatemalan hybrids planted out a little more than a year, have now recovered and are growing vigorously and flowering freely. Mr. Allison reports that he has the following named budded varieties, most of which have flowered but as yet none have produced fruit, i. e. Caliente, Dorothea, Fuerte, Lyon, Mayapan, Northrup, Puebla, and Spinks. He is confident that the Avocados will be a success in the Dominion. It is of interest to know that at Mr. Allison's place frost up to 10 to 12 degrees is often experienced in the Winter.

Gisborne—Mr. Geo. H. McIndoe, the Government Orchard Instructor, who is keenly interested in sub-tropical horticulture, informs me that in his district Avocado Seedlings from Ceylon are growing satisfactorily. Others from Cook Island seed have not done so well, but it is suggested that the dry season may have accounted for this. There are four trees, 4 years old, in the Gisborne district (seedlings, origin unknown) which have stood 10 degrees of frost on three occasions without injury, all are healthy, and vigorous and appear suited to the locality.

Auckland and Northwards—Mr. W. Shaw, of Pohuehue, Warkworth, has been experimenting with seedling Avocados of both Mexican and Guatemalan origin for some years past. These are growing on somewhat heavy soil; at first they did well, but latterly they have not been growing so freely, and some have died out. Mr. Shaw is satisfied it is the soil conditions which are at fault.

Mr. W. Poynton of Epsom, (Magistrate) Auckland City, has a few seedling trees 5 years old, from the same stock as Mr. Shaw's. These with one exception are growing well, the largest is now about 12 feet high, the soil is light, well drained volcanic land, almost frost free. This seems another indication that the Avocado requires a light, loamy, well drained soil if it is to succeed. In the far north, where the avocado should succeed best, the writer only knows of one tree. This is a seedling about 10 years old, which is growing in a warm, sunny spot free from all frosts. Its origin is unknown; some one brought a large fruit to New Zealand and from the stone this tree grew. It is not a particularly happy specimen, only about 6 feet high, and is very yellow in colour, except for a few weeks in the middle of the summer when it turns green. There appears to be no doubt, that this variety is one from the tropics and wholly unsuited to the climatic conditions of North New Zealand.

Conclusion—There would appear to be every chance of the better classes of Avocado hybrids as grown in the Coast lands of California succeeding well on the Citrus Belts of the North Island and in a few favoured spots in the North of the South Island of New Zealand. There will have to be considerable experimental work done on varieties, soils, and root stocks, before the New Zealand grown avocado will find any considerable place in the fruit markets.