

## AVOCADO CULTURE IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

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The avocado was known in the Canary Islands since shortly after the New World was discovered by the Spaniards in 1492. Probably seeds were brought many times since the early days because many of the ships that sailed between America and Spain came to the Islands first, and from here they crossed the sea to the newly-discovered lands or to the home country. Columbus sailed in his three trips to America first from Spain to Gomera, one of the smaller islands, staying for rest, water and food for the sailing, and for small repairs of the ships, before crossing the ocean.

The avocados growing here until recently were all seedlings of the West Indian race. There was really no commercial culture of avocados, only some trees growing in the irrigated farms near the coast. Therefore, the fruit produced was consumed locally as it had no conditions for outside markets.

Since 1935 the Agricultural Experiment Station of Teneriffe, belonging to the Spanish Department of Agriculture, started the studies of avocado varieties, budding and grafting, etc., in order to establish a modern avocado culture in the Islands. Due to the wars, the work couldn't be carried on. In 1953 we started again with the whole project of developing modern avocado growing in the Canary Islands and solved the different problems that arose. Actually, there are already several small plantations of budded avocado trees of winter varieties that bear well. Many farmers are interested in this crop and are eager to plant winter avocados of good varieties. There are already export markets for the fruit produced. Most is sent by airplane to Madrid and some by boat to foreign countries. The problem now is to plant more avocados and produce more fruit. We need to produce many more trees in the nursery.

The main varieties that we recommend now to the growers and that we produce in the nursery are: Fuerte, Hass, Rincon and Bacon from California, and Orotava, Robusto and Gema, varieties that we have obtained in Teneriffe during our work with avocados. Fuerte bears well and regularly every year, as also do the three other American varieties.

*Orotava* is a very good variety; produces heavily and regularly, and the tree develops well, forming a broad top. It is of the Guatemalan race. The fruit is round and, when ripe, it is black; the skin is rather rough and thick; the seed is round and small, and the flesh is free of any fibers and of very good eating quality. It weighs 300-400 grams generally and matures from February to April, according to the local climate. It ripens here about the same time as Fuerte and we consider the quality of the fruit, as good or even better.

*Robusto* is a good variety, a hybrid of Mexican and West Indian race, probably. The fruit is pear-shaped and green and has thin skin. The pulp is of good eating quality. The fruit matures from January to March according to the location of the trees. It weighs 200-300

grams and the seed is small and oval-shaped.

*Gema* is probably a hybrid of the West Indian and Guatemalan races. The fruit is pear-shaped and green, and with thin skin. It weighs from 400 to 600 grams and the seed about 100 grams. The quality of the fruit is good. The fruit ripens in December and January.

We have studied also many other varieties, from California and Florida mainly, and have some other varieties of our own. We are propagating only the best ones suited to our conditions and that fruit which ripens in winter and spring because the prices are higher and the fruit keeps better.

For rootstock we use seeds of the West Indian race produced locally by the seedling trees. We bud the young plants in summer and generally in winter they are ready to be transplanted.

So far, very few pests and diseases attack avocados in the Canary Islands but in the future, when the area planted is larger, some treatment may be needed.

We believe that about 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres) could be planted in the next 10 or 12 years and that a good market for the fruit is ready in Spain and also in the foreign countries of Europe. The avocado trees grow and produce well from sea level to 400-500 meters elevation and are more profitable than banana growing from 250-300 meters elevation up. The avocado is a promising new crop for the irrigated farms of the Canary Islands and will more fully diversify our agriculture.