

SOME NEW AVOCADO VARIETIES

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At the 1933 meeting of this Society, and at the first session of the Krome Memorial Institute, my erstwhile colleague, Mr. L. R. Toy, described a number of promising new varieties of avocado. There have been no further reports on new varieties in the intervening five years, but so carefully was his list compiled that today there are only a few more to add to it.

Before describing these new varieties, I wish to refer briefly to the present status of the varieties described for you in 1933 as promising. Fifteen varieties were included in that list. Of these, four are now considered worthy of general recommendation—Fuchsia, Booth 7, Booth 8 and Tonnage. Fuchsia is still the earliest commercial variety, and while it lacks quality until August, it can be shipped in late June. We need a better early variety, but until we find it we shall continue to propagate the Fuchsia. The other three varieties above mentioned all mature in the desirable late fall or early winter period, are all fairly heavy bearing, and are all opposite in flower type to the standard Lula and Taylor varieties of the same season, so that they serve to assure pollination.

There is another group of three varieties—Nehrling, Nirody and Steven's Choice, which have definitely proven unsatisfactory for commercial propagation, at least on the lower East Coast. Intermediate between these two groups lie the majority of the varieties described as new in 1933. Their performance has not been such as to warrant extensive propagation, yet they have not shown up so badly that propagation is opposed. Some of them may yet show characteristics of bearing or season which will bring them into first rank favor. This group includes Ajax, Booth 3, Collinred, Collinred Seedling B, Dunedin, Indian River, Nelson, Trappson, Vero and Waldo (formerly Sexton).

The most interesting new development in avocado varieties in the past five years has been the patenting of seedlings under the plant patent law. Two California growers took out plant patents in 1936, and in 1937 the first Florida avocado variety was patented. This was the Monroe, patented by J. J. L. Phillips of Coconut Grove in the name of J. R. Byrum, manager of his Redland groves. The Monroe is a large elliptical fruit of handsome appearance, with dark green, slightly pebbled, glossy skin. The flesh is yellow and thick, while the skin is fairly thick too, insuring good shipping. The fruit matures from December to February, and has a fat content of 10 to 15 per cent., which is low for that season but satisfactory. Thus far it has been a heavy bearer. The variety is of somewhat academic interest to the avocado grower at present, because Mr. Phillips is not interested in distributing it. While the fruit is larger than is believed desirable for an avocado for commercial planting, its handsome appearance, large amount of meat and excellent quality may more than compensate for the size handicap.

The Simpson avocado originated as a root sprout from a budded tree in the grove of R. L. Simpson in the Redlands. It is also rather large, but is of good appearance and matures in November and December. The fruit is obovate or elliptical, dull light green in color, with a moderately thick and pliable skin and good thickness of flesh. The fat content is about like the Monroe. It has been under observation for several years and seems to bear good crops, well distributed. Like the Booth varieties, it is in Class B for pollination.

The Avon variety originated as a seedling tree in the grove of W. F. Ward near Avon Park. The parent tree has been characterized by phenomenal bearing, and Mr. Ward is planning to obtain a plant patent. The fruit is shaped somewhat like a Waldin, but matures in December and January. It is of medium size, with smooth, glossy, medium green, thin skin and rather a large seed. The fat content is from 8 to 14 per cent. The heavy bearing proclivities of this attractive variety, with its good appearance and season, more than offset its rather large proportion of seed. It is of the class for pollination.

On the West Coast near Clearwater, a Fuerte seedling has been selected by Mr. Barney Kilgore for propagation. This Kilgore avocado matures in November and December, and like most of the hybrid avocado varieties it is a vigorous grower. The fruit is rather large, averaging two pounds, and is oblong or elliptical in shape, with smooth, green skin and seed of medium size. Several growers on the Pinellas peninsula have been testing the variety and have found it very satisfactory there. The large size is again a handicap, which heavy bearing and good appearance may overcome.

The Steffani variety has been propagated on a small scale in Dade County. The tree has produced large crops rather regularly, and the fruit is of good size and appearance, resembling a small edition of the Winslowson. The season is December and January, and the fat content 8 to 12 per cent. Unfortunately the seed is quite large, and this has probably prevented more extensive propagation. Another variety similarly handicapped by a very large seed but which has recently been propagated on a large scale in the Redlands area is the Booth No. 1. This variety resembles Booth 7 somewhat in general appearance, but is reputed to be even more regular in bearing and is of somewhat larger size. The writer's personal opinion is that propagation of varieties with very large seeds in proportion to the amount of flesh is a step in the wrong direction for the avocado industry. Sooner or later the consumer is going to buy avocados on a food value basis, and will then discriminate against varieties which give him mostly seed instead of meat.

The most recent seedling of promise which has come to the attention of the writer is one on the grounds of Mr. Willis Hall in Miami. This tree has very attractive fruit which greatly resemble the Pollock but mature during February and March. The size is large, but smaller than Pollock, and the quality is excellent, while the skin is thick enough for good shipping. It is too early to predict the bearing of this tree, and no topworked trees have fruited yet.

It should be noted that all of the new varieties here recorded bear evidence of being hybrids between the West Indian and Guatemalan races.

It is becoming more and more evident that until such time as some relief can be obtained from unrestrained competition during the summer from Cuban seedlings, the Florida avocado industry must look to these hybrid forms for the profitable varieties for propagation and culture.