

AVOCADO GROWING IN PORTO RICO

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The avocado or aguacate is cultivated generally throughout the island of Porto Rico. The fruits are of good quality and are highly esteemed by all. Regular shipments to northern markets are not yet being made, nor are there yet any bearing trees in orchard form plantings. But the natural and political conditions are so peculiarly advantageous that a very profitable future for the avocado industry is assured.

The avocado is perfectly at home in Porto Rico and thrives in the dooryards and fence corners of rich and poor alike. The fruit is appreciated both as a delicacy and as a substantial food, and is an important item of diet.

The bearing trees are all seedlings, of the South American or West Indian type, flowering in the spring and fruiting in the fall months. They are vigorous, precocious, and prolific, and seem to be remarkably free from serious diseases and insect pests. The wood, however, is quite brittle and even large branches are frequently broken off by winds that would not bother most trees. Furthermore the heart wood is quite soft and rapidly decays upon exposure. In windswept localities avocado trees are not found in Porto Rico.

The fruits vary considerably in size weighing generally from 9 to 14 ounces, and in shape range from almost spherical to quite long necked. The skin is tough and leathery but of course not so thick nor so brittle as in the Guatemalan varieties. However it is more attractive, being smooth, yellowish green, and capable of taking a polish.

The flesh is almost always yellowish, rich, and oily. Very rarely is it watery or of poor flavor. The seeds are more frequently than not loose in the cavity, and are often unnecessarily large. Government Horticulturists consider the better Porto Rican varieties to be fully the equal, if not the superior, of any they have known in many years experience in Cuba, Hawaii, etc.

The trees are given no attention whatever but successfully shift for themselves even under quite dissimilar conditions. There are places, however, as at the Experiment Station at Mayaguez where the soil is very heavy and poorly drained, and the avocado will not grow even with exceptional attention.

The fruit is consumed locally and may be had in the markets from late June until December. From August until October it is most plentiful and sells for one to two cents each. Late in October it is selling for as low as 3¢ in Ponce, 6¢ to 7¢ in Mayaguez, and up to 10¢ each in San Juan. With a million and a quarter people on the Island and every one of them appreciating the fruit, there will be some local demand for out of season fruit at good prices once the Guatemalan type begins to bear here.

The marketing in the north of seedling avocados from Porto Rico has not yet been done with entire success. Many have shipped a few boxes, and even shipped on several occasions, but none have been justified in making regular shipments through the season, though fruit sells for 35¢ and 50¢ in New York compared with 1¢ and 2¢ in San Juan.

There is a general belief among the fruit growers of the Island that avocados will not stand shipment. A few years ago a prominent New York fancy fruit house sent a man here to buy and ship them avocados. He shipped large quantities,—and lost it all in transit. Investigation shows he bought the fruit delivered in town and that it had been shaken, and clubbed from the tree, as well as bruised in the handling. Many well informed citrus and pineapple growers have had similar results even after careful picking, and packing. Most of them have packed in orange or other deep boxes where the several layers of fruit could mash each other.

The successful shippers have not only picked and handled the avocados carefully, but have packed them in single layer boxes, as tomato crates, and with a little excelsior to prevent movement. By so packing, repeated shipments have been made without any loss whatever. It has been demonstrated that the fruit will carry satisfactorily to market if properly packed.

Probably most of the avocados shipped north from Porto Rico have arrived showing heavy loss; and the fancy fruit houses do not encourage further shipments. They have even discouraged shipments on consignment from those who have demonstrated their ability to deliver the fruit in good condition. Direct sales at auction have not been encouraging. Recently with fruit of not a bit better quality retailing at 35c to 50c each, good Porto Rican avocados in sound condition brought \$1.50 to \$1.65 for 24s and 36s and a maximum of \$2.25 to \$2.50 for 18s. At these prices the shipments were not continued.

Closer co-operation between the shipper and salesman should make possible a considerable business in wild avocados from Porto Rico.

The growing of named varieties of avocados in orchard form has only recently been taken up by American fruit growers. Many of the best known varieties of both hard and soft skinned types have been imported and are making a vigorous growth. None are yet in bearing. The fruit growers as a class are just beginning to realize the possibilities of the Island as a tropical hot house located so accessible to New York and the great eastern markets.

The future of the avocado in Porto Rico is bright. The rapid and still vigorous growth of the grapefruit and pineapple industries in Porto Rico indicate, in a manner, what may be expected of the avocado. Porto Rico's position is so peculiar, her advantages so unique, that what may happen in the future is hard to guess. Can you imagine your own section with plenty of labor at 50¢ to 70¢ per day, with spring weather the year around, ample rainfall well distributed, no possibility of frost, two and three boats per week direct to New York, and freight rates of but 25c to 3Bc per orange box to market? Porto Rico enjoys all these advantages, and more, over her competitors for the American markets. She is just beginning to realize her good fortune and to plan to prepare to make the most of it. A movement is already on foot to establish a tropical fruit propagation and demonstration station on the Island to assist in the building of the avocado and similar industries.