

Avocado Notes from Foreign Countries Haiti and Palestine

Knowles Ryerson

Haiti:

Among the many fruits used extensively for food both by natives of Haiti and by foreign residents of that interesting country, the avocado is one of the most important. The tree is to be found growing generally throughout the country, except in the driest parts. They are all of the West Indian race but great variation exists. The fruits may be small weighing 6 to 8 ounces, but usually range from 12 to 24 and even 30 ounces. In shape they may be round, oval, pear-shaped, or long and bottle-necked. The skin may be fairly thin or thick and leathery, approaching in some cases almost to that of the Guatemalan race in respect to the latter characteristic. The color varies from light, livid green through dark green and maroon to deep purple. The color of the flesh likewise varies greatly, being sometimes clear, bright yellow throughout, dull, flat yellow throughout, or with varying amounts of green near the skin.

In size and shape of seed, wide variation occurs. Both tight and loose-seeded types occur. In proportion to the size of the fruit, the seed may be fairly small to very large.

Quality also varies. Some are almost tasteless, the flesh being watery and flat, others, apparently of a higher oil content, have a rich, nutty flavor equaling the Guatemalan fruits. Some fruits are stringy, others smooth and buttery. The only sure guide in purchasing satisfactory fruit is to secure them from known trees. The prevailing low price—one cent each, or in the time of greatest abundance even two for a cent—permits one to buy in quantity, discarding several out of every dozen if necessary.

While avocados can be purchased any month of the year, the bulk of the crop matures during the summer months. During the winter months the amount of fruit is rather small and prices are correspondingly higher. Some fruit is shipped to Panama for sale on the Canal Zone. A limited amount of the very largest and most attractive fruit is sold in baskets to the passengers on the larger ships stopping at Port au Prince. Most of the fruit, however, is carried to the local markets in native wicker baskets balanced on the heads of peasants, or in wicker panniers carried on the backs of plodding diminutive donkeys.

The great variation in quality and in season offers a real opportunity for the improvement of this fruit by selection from the best types now growing in the various parts of the country. Practically nothing has been attempted in this direction as yet though such studies are contemplated.

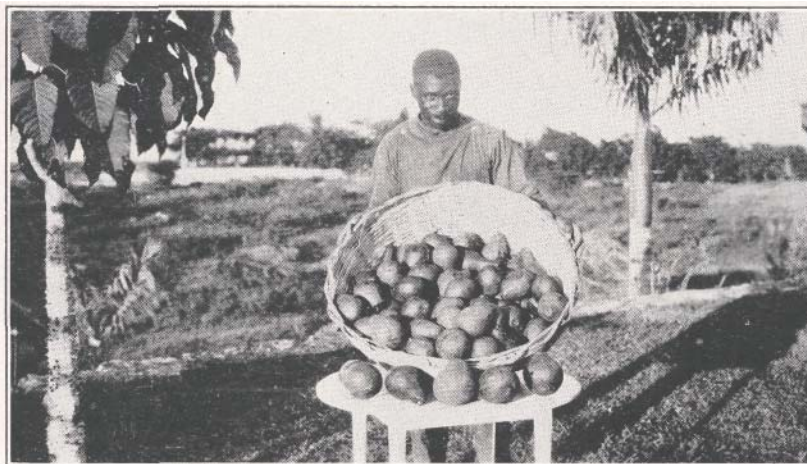
A careful selection and propagation of such types would greatly improve the avocado production of Haiti and might also yield varieties suitable for other countries. Some of the types now maturing during the winter months are distinctly worthy of introduction

and trial in Florida.

Introductions of the best California and Florida varieties of the avocado to Haiti were made by the writer in 1925 and 1926 at the Central Experiment Station of the Haitian Department of Agriculture near Port au Prince, and by L. W. Jongeneel of the Haytian Pineapple Company (a subsidiary of the California Packing Corporation) at its plantation on the northern coast near Cape Haitien. While the conditions at both of these points are not similar to the higher, cooler regions of Central America, where the Guatemalan race originated, the behavior of these introduced trees in Haiti is being watched with much interest. Their adaptation to the higher ridges, from two to three thousand feet in elevation, should be tried. The varieties include Fuerte, Dutton, Dorothea, Ward, Panchoy, Mayapan, Dickinson, Collinson, Winslowson and Trapp. Several of these have already fruited at Cape Haitien.



Seedling avocado trees are a common feature of the landscape in many parts of Haiti



A group of avocados selected from the market in Port au Prince, in early December. They vary in quality as much as in shape.

Palestine:

The avocado is a new introduction in Palestine. Apparently the first trees to be planted in that ancient country were received from California in 1924. Trees received that year were planted in Rehovoth and Petach Tikveh, two flourishing settlements in the orange-growing district not far from Jaffa. Both Dickinson and Fuerte varieties were included in this first introduction and both have made remarkable growth, better than the average for the same varieties in California. The Dickinson set fruit in both places at three years of age. The behavior of these plantings has aroused much interest in the possibilities of the avocado as a possible new commercial crop and during the past year further introductions of varieties from California and Florida have been made. These include the following varieties: Fuerte, Taft, Pollock, Northrop, Itzamna, Queen, Lulu and Collinson.

The climate of this coastal belt of Palestine is in many respects apparently favorable for the growing of avocados. Absence of frosts in winter insures a long-growing period. The humidity is fairly high along the narrow strip close to the Mediterranean. It remains to be seen whether the hot, dry Sirocco winds, which at times blow from the Arabian desert in late spring or early summer, will seriously affect the setting of fruit; the past season this has been the case with the Fuerte and Dickinson. These winds cause serious damage to deciduous trees. The planting of windbreaks could materially reduce damage from winter winds which also occur in this district.



3 year old Fuerte Avocado trees. Petach Tickveh, Palestine.

Even though it may be found possible to grow the fruit successfully in Palestine, the establishment of a profitable industry would depend upon a campaign of education to create a market for the product. The avocado is new to Palestine and not generally familiar in Europe; at present there exists no demand for it. The winter tourist trade in Egypt and Palestine offers a beginning market, as has been the case with grapefruit. It is likely that a limited luxury market in Europe would eventually expand if carefully stimulated and encouraged. The future of Palestinian horticulture seems to lie in the direction of specialty crops to which its climate is peculiarly adapted. Among these the

avocado is one of some promise.

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Three year old Dickinson avocado on which fruit has set.
Petach Tickva, Palestine