

Avocados on the French Riviera

John Asch

The French Riviera is a narrow strip of land extending for about 125 miles from Toulon to Mentone near the Italian frontier. It varies from about one fourth to ten miles wide. In this area there are some seventy odd avocado trees. They are all planted not more than 500 yards in a straight line from the sea, and at altitudes of from 35 to 150 feet above sea level. Three of them are gigantic. The tree shown in the illustration is located at Cannes and is about 65 feet high, its trunk being 20 inches in diameter twenty feet from the ground. Its age is unknown, but it bears regularly each year about 500 small light green fruit, but of not too good a quality.

There isn't any tree in bearing that is less than 20 years old, and there seem to have to be at least five trees near each other in order that some of them may bear. There is no case of an isolated tree bearing no matter what its age or height. As far as I can gather, all of these trees came from seeds brought from either Mexico, Florida, or California. Most of the leaves have the aromatic anise like smell. They are all in good health. I have not seen any diseases on either stem or leaf. It seems that very few of these trees receive any water or care at all. In fact the best examples are at Cannes and Mentone where the water supply is not very abundant. I was not able to see any difference in either the health, growth, or fruitfulness of any tree affected in any way by its water supply. The average annual rainfall in this area is about 32 inches and falls from October to the middle of May.

LITTLE INTEREST SHOWN

There seems to be very little interest in the avocado here, mainly because the varieties take too long to bear fruit, and the fruit has not the rich nutty flavor which it has in America. This region is becoming more and more fruit conscious, and interest in fruit growing is increasing as the perfumery factories are closing up. Perhaps if suitable varieties were found for this section there might be an excellent market developed as the entire world comes here and visitors have highly developed taste for fine foods. As for example, when I started out here the Frenchmen didn't know or care much for raspberries. I planted quite a large patch of the Lloyd George variety of red raspberry. They are doing splendidly and I cannot begin to satisfy the market notwithstanding that I receive the exaggerated price of seventy-five cents a pound.

In order to give an idea of the climatic conditions here I may say that the lowest thermometer reading in a twenty year period is 25 F. The highest is 93 F. Pigs, almonds, and many lemons grow well and fruit yearly without any care whatsoever, and in a practically wild state. The date palm grows well but the fruit does not ripen here. The banana ripens when grown against a white stone wall in a protected corner. The

peach is our most difficult fruit to cultivate as it harbors all the diseases and most of the insects. On our place we have thirty-five species of fruit ranging from the apple to the banana, all doing well and fruiting. Beets, carrots, lettuce, leek, and celery are grown all year round out doors without any protection.

I wish to thank you very much for this opportunity of helping in a small way in the really remarkable work the California Avocado Association has been doing since its start. I don't think any other agricultural cooperative association anywhere has so very thoroughly studied their subject from all angles and with such honesty. I will gladly report to anyone in California interested on any of the other crops that are raised in this extraordinary Cote d'Azur.



Fruiting Mexican avocado tree at Cannes on the French Riviera.