

The Cactus Fruit - A Commercial Product of San Diego County

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Arranged by the editor from notes and photographs kindly sent by Lowell and Metzger of Calavo Growers. Photos by H. W. Roche, Deputy County Commissioner in charge of Standardization.

For twenty years B. Mescalco and his two sons, Sam and Leon, have operated their tuna cactus plantation near Lakeside, San Diego County. Leon is now serving in the U.S. Army and the work is carried on by Sam and his father. Approximately 28 acres are in cactus orchard, which is located on a relatively frost free slope. The principal variety grown is the "Ficodindia" (meaning Indian Fig), which was originally introduced from Italy. The variety is free from spines, but not from minute spicules which necessitates some care in handling and eating.

In order to produce fruit of high quality, the Mescalcos have found that cactus must be irrigated, cultivated, pruned, fertilized, and sprayed for insect pests the same as any other commercial fruit crop.

In harvesting the fruit, pickers wear heavy rubber aprons and gauntlet-gloves to protect them from the spicules. The fruit is assembled in a modern packing-house on the ranch where girls, wearing rubber aprons and gloves, grade, wrap, and pack the fruit in two layer flats.

Practically all the crop, which usually amounts to around 20,000 boxes, is shipped direct to New York City where it is much in demand by the Italian population. The Italians learned to like this fruit in their homeland as well as in their North African colonies.



In a pleasant little valley near Lakeside the Maniscalco tuna cactus farm, with residence and packing-house, is situated on a slope overlooking the San Diego River.



Girls packing tuna cactus fruits in a modern packing-house on the Maniscalco farm.



Tuna cactus pickers wear rubber gauntlet-gloves and rubber aprons. The fruit is gathered in metal buckets.



Sam Maniscalco uses a knife to cut the skin of the fruit and demonstrates the way it folds back leaving the bright magenta colored flesh to be eaten without hazard from the minute spicules.