

WHAT ABOUT AVOCADOS IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY?

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Avocado plantings in Riverside County now total 600 acres with half of this classed as non-bearing or young trees less than 6 years old. This one sentence may give a good summary but it leaves much to be said about the present situation.

As is indicated by the acreage of young trees, many of the plantings have been made in the last few years. Since this is a relatively new area, the selection of the proper variety is the critical problem. What information have we which can be used to select the best variety? At the present time we must rely on the performance of the trees in commercial plantings and in variety plots established by the Agricultural Extension Service in cooperation with interested growers and on the variety plot at the Citrus Experiment Station.

Let us divide the county into three parts: (1) Riverside-Corona, (2) Hemet, and (3) Coachella Valley. Practically all the commercial plantings are in the Riverside-Corona area with most of these in or near Corona.

The climate of the Corona area is intermediate between a warm interior and a coastal section. It has a warm summer temperature modified by westerly coastal breezes which often blow in the afternoons.

A summary of the performances of the most promising varieties in the Corona area indicate that Hass and Zutano are the best. The Hass is outstanding in fruit quality and has a good record of production. Plantings should be limited to those areas with a low frost hazard as it is tender to frost.

The Zutano will stand several degrees lower temperature than the Hass. It lacks the fruit quality of the Hass although it is still considered as acceptable to the consumer. The end spot on the fruit is not as large as develops in some other areas. Its record of production is one of the best.

The Fuerte has been satisfactory in a few favored locations but in general, the production has been so poor and erratic that it cannot be recommended for commercial planting in this area.

There are a few additional varieties which show considerable promise based upon limited trials.

The Nowels is interesting because it has an early maturity. Fruit can be picked in October or November, although it holds well on the tree after that time. Fruit quality is good and it is one of the best early varieties. Although production tends to alternate from year to year, it has a good average.

The Ryan although somewhat erratic in production has averaged well over a period of several years. Fruit quality is good but should be harvested not later than the end of June or early July.

The Bacon has shown promise in limited trials. The fruit is mature in December. Observations in test plots indicate that the tree is a frost hardy variety, somewhat better than Zutano in this respect. The fruit is attractive. A dark colored area tends to develop in the flesh at the end of the fruit when held on the tree for too long a time.

In the Hemet area the summer climate is warmer than the Riverside-Corona area, although it is about the same distance from the coast as Riverside. Information on avocado performance is based upon variety plots which have been established in the area and a few small commercial plantings. In order to obtain fruit performance records quicker, several seedling trees growing in the area have been grafted over to varieties to be tested.

The Zutano has a consistent and good record of production. The typical end spot is quite small on fruit produced in this area. The fruit appears to be a little later in maturity than similar varieties in Corona.

The few Fuerte trees growing in the area have been rather erratic in production. They have at times had a heavy crop. The fruit holds well on the tree developing little corkiness.

The two Bacon trees on trial have produced well and the fruit has been smooth and attractive. The development of a dark discolored area on the end of the fruit has varied considerably in different years.

Both the Nowels and Hass trees in test plots have set a good crop as young grafted trees. More information is needed to judge their value.

The Coachella Valley is not usually considered a good area in which to grow avocados. Based upon observations of some trees planted in yards and variety trial plots, however, the avocado appears to be a satisfactory back yard tree in wind protected locations with a low frost hazard.

Two variety plantings established under date palms indicate that there is not enough sunlight to grow avocados satisfactorily under well grown date palms set the usual distance apart. Later plantings under very little shade or in full sun have been more satisfactory.

The "Indio or Desert avocado" is a well known old avocado growing in full sunlight near Indio. Its trunk is 12 to 14 inches in diameter. It is quite alternate in production varying from almost nothing to over 400 pounds in years with a good crop. Several Zutano trees have been started by grafting on established seedlings. These trees growing in full sun have produced good crops considering their size and age. Two trees in the shade of date palms have had only a few fruit per tree each year. Two years ago when the weather suddenly turned warm in June, nearly all the fruit dropped from all trees.

The one Irving tree growing under date palms has been the best producer of the ten (10) varieties on trial under dates. Trials are planned to test its performance with more sunlight.

Observations of commercial plantings and variety test plots indicate that the avocado can be produced successfully in several areas of the county. A prediction of the future acreage would be based upon economic considerations such as the possible return per acre for avocados as compared with other alternative crops.