

**THE AVOCADO VERSUS DECIDUOUS FRUIT TREES**

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*(Mr. Micke conducted the tree crop work in Santa Barbara County while Farm Advisor George E. Goodall was on sabbatical leave. )*

In this article I would like to compare the avocado, as I see it, to deciduous fruit trees with which I have had more experience. For the past year I have been carrying on the avocado and other tree crop work in the University of California Farm Advisors' Office, Santa Barbara County. Prior to this time, my experience had been almost entirely in the field of deciduous fruit crops. This position has given me a chance to become more familiar with the avocado and other subtropical plants.

In many ways there is little or no difference between these long-term crops. Being growing plants they all need irrigation, fertilization, weed control, and the other cultural practices which go along with crop production. However, there are differences in the way the various practices are carried out and in the way these crops are grown.

The most striking differences between these crops is that the avocado is an evergreen, while deciduous trees lose their leaves during fall and winter months. This lack of dormancy, right off, limits avocado production; to areas which are relatively frost free. Deciduous fruit trees are not limited to this extent by frost, but may be limited in some warmer areas by lack of winter chilling to break the rest period.

On some avocado varieties, this year's and next year's crop are on the tree at the same time. On deciduous fruit trees, next year's fruit buds are being formed while this year's crop is on the tree, but only one actual crop is on the tree at a time.

The avocado is more shallow-rooted than deciduous fruit trees when both are grown on deep soils. Because of this, avocados require less water per irrigation, but more frequent irrigations. However, with the threat of root rot, avocados are also particularly sensitive to over-irrigation.

Many avocado groves are maintained under noncultivation with the use of herbicides. Most deciduous orchards are cultivated, as no herbicides other than weed oil are recommended for use in these crops at this time. Being quite shallow-rooted, avocado trees maintained under concultivation have the advantage of being able to use the upper foot of soil quite efficiently.

Most deciduous fruit trees need at least a little annual pruning, with some (e.g., peaches and apricots) requiring an extensive annual pruning. Avocados, on the other hand, often require no pruning and should only be pruned when absolutely necessary—(such as controlling tree height, removing dead wood, preventing limb breakage and wind damage, etc.).

Generally little, if any, pest control is required in avocados at the present time. However, to raise high quality fruit and maintain tree health, deciduous fruit trees, like citrus, generally require at least some pest control.

Most avocado varieties will hold on the tree for some time after reaching maturity. This factor, plus the use of various varieties, can help provide a steady year-round supply of avocados and help prevent "gluts" on the market. On the other hand, many of the deciduous fruits must be picked as maturity is reached, or within a short time. If there is a delay in the picking of the deciduous fruits, the fruit is generally lost or quality impaired.

The above are some brief comments and comparisons that come to my mind after working in an avocado producing county for one year. Probably there are other general comparisons of the avocado with deciduous fruit trees but, to me, the above are the most striking.