

MY EXPERIENCE IN GROWING THE AVOCADO

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I have been requested to read a paper on my experience as an avocado grower. I do not know whether I have a message worth while on the subject or not, but if my experience is of any value to the industry I am only too glad to give it.

The avocado industry, like the orange business at its beginning, is groping in the dark with a lot of unprofitable varieties, and a great deal of money and time is being spent trying out the various trees and finding out what is worth planting.

I planted my first trees in 1912, and as they were potted, they were all badly root-bound. The freeze came on and settled them, and I dug most of them up and learned what my troubles were. One seedling came through without much damage, and as it had refused to support the high-priced buds that I had repeatedly stuck into it, I decided to allow it to remain a seedling. The second year it matured 4 fruits; the next year it had 36, and last year it had about 350. My enthusiastic avocado friends advised me to place a 32-foot fence around it with a lock on the gate and a burglar alarm appliance to prevent people stealing the buds and begin selling them at two bits per. As it had no especial merit over many others that I knew of, I decided not to afflict the dear, suffering public with any more varieties but allowed all that wanted them, to have buds free. Very few availed themselves of the opportunity, though the fruit was better than some of those behind the fence.

I bought Blakes that turned out to be Harmans and Murrietas that were Tafts. A Mexican No. 6 must have been 4-11 -44 or some other number. At any rate it was not a winner.

Like some others, I thought there was some easy money in the nursery business raising the trees, and I broke into the game with about 2000 seeds. I planted these in a hot-bed very close together, and when they sprouted and got a top on them about 2 inches high, I transplanted them to the nursery row. Just why one should go to the expense of starting them in a pot is something I could not quite understand.

Some trees have a tight bark that will scarcely ever take a bud, and I got hold of a bunch of local seeds of this character and fattened the bud seller for quite a while! before I got next to it. We will learn that it is not all in the bud, but there is a lot of our troubles in, the character of the tree, and this will help us a lot in selecting our seeds. I saw a bunch of big, fat, Tahiti seeds and bought some of them. It seemed to me that they froze before the thermometer got to 32. At any rate, if all are like the ones I got they will not do for this country. I helped to replenish the gold reserve of the bud seller with my nursery for three years and then gave the proposition away to a fellow for nothing. Up to date he has not brought an action against me for damages but I feel rather guilty every time I meet him.

I have observed many failures among the growers, and most of them are due to a lack of care. If one plans to raise avocado trees among orange trees and depends on their growing by watering them with the regular run, he will find that they will not do well. Avocados should be watered at least every two weeks, and with small trees, oftener is better. Much depends on the character of the soil. They will stand a mighty lot of hardship and still hang on, but they will do no good. The trunk of the tree should always be protected from the hot sun until it grows its own shade. I had *very* poor success heading out trees too high. As they grow, I have found that one can prune off the lower limbs, but the avocado is a tree that winds and twists more or less, and it is hard to tram certain varieties and get them to make a good looking tree.

I bought trees that had been budded on two and possibly three-year-old rootstocks. This had been accomplished by sawing off the trunk at the ground and allowing a sprout to grow up, placing the bud in that. When balled, this stump is hid, and you think you are getting a fine tree, only to learn later that it does not grow. You can figure on the loss of about a half year's growth or more on trees of this character, no matter how much care you give them. The second year, they will take hold and grow, but I find it does not pay to plant that sort of a tree.

There is much to learn about what buds will grow on a bud-stick. Many of you learned this in the good old days when you bought high-priced ones, and the seller counted in the weak buds. The bud seller in many instances did not know this and of course did not mean to sell worthless buds. There are certain kinks in every variety, and the only way you can learn this is by actual experience. I have found that the early spring budding is the best. Others claim different times, but at the best I have met with numerous failures in certain kinds, and I find I am not alone in this. Some buds will take hold and give great hopes, only to disappoint one later. I nursed a Murrieta for two years, and at the end of that time it was not over 2 inches larger than it was when I planted it. I have some Royals that grew fine last year and this spring they look like a picked chicken.

Where budded trees are to be rebudded, in many cases I think it will be advisable to get back to the seedling stock, in preference to budding on the budded tree. This can be accomplished by stubbing back the tree at the ground and allowing a shoot to come up from below the old bud, then working from that. As some trees grow so much more thriftily than others, it is not-advisable to mix them up too¹ much. This is not practical with trees of any considerable size.

I have a Challenge bud, growing in a Harman trunk, and a similar one in a seedling stock about 25 feet away, and there is no comparison between the two. The one on the Harman is a year older than the seedling, and it is not as large. I know of instances where growers have been advised to plant Harmans to be top-worked later, when we know more definitely what we want to grow. My experience has taught me that we are going against trouble when we pursue this course. I have sometimes thought that our nurserymen were over-persuaded that this was true because they were long on Harmans.

Quite a few people in my neighborhood thought well of the avocado outlook and planted quite liberally, only to learn that the variety they have is not worth while. One man dug up about 2 acres because he was unable to determine what variety was best to grow.

So much has been said about the different trees, and some are condemning them while others will pronounce them all right, that the uninitiated are unable to determine who is right, and so they let it alone.

I am very optimistic about the future of the avocado, despite the fact that I have bought about all the trees that did not pan out.

A man in Florida had a secret process for grafting avocados that he assured us was a winner. He asked \$500 for it, but I could not think he had very much over us here in California, and later he sent it to me for the same price I got for my nursery. It would not work for me.

I had 14 trees that fruited last year, ranging from a half dozen fruits to 350. On account of the high cost of potatoes, we only sold a few. The price we received was very satisfactory. When I learned that some of them were bought by Mexican laborers, I thought they sold too high.

The thin-skins showed a tendency to drop just before they ripened. I was unable to determine why this was so. Possibly it was from a lack of water, as I withhold irrigation in the fall to prepare the trees for winter.

I could not grow the Trapp variety. It froze badly each winter, and I dug all the trees out.

With foot-rot and gum disease in our orange orchards, and black scale that is immune to cyanide, the avocado looks mighty good to me. Those of you that have tried replacing an orange tree in an old grove know what you are up against. I can get more results with an avocado tree in three years than with an orange tree in seven. Next year will see every unprofitable orange tree in my grove removed, and there are a mighty lot of them in most groves I know anything about. The avocado is going to be a great boon to orange growers who have a lot of trees that should be dug out.