

California Avocado Association Annual Report 1918 and 1919 4:30-31

WHEN IS AN AVOCADO RIPE? HOW TO TELL A RIPE FRUIT

MRS. B. H. SHARPLESS,
SANTA ANA

It is not too early in the history of the avocado industry, to agitate the question as to what measures may be taken to prevent the marketing of unripe fruit.

It will probably be some time, perhaps years, before we may hope for governmental aid in this direction, and, in the meantime, the industry may receive irreparable injury, unless the Avocado Association is able to foster a sentiment against offering immature fruit to the public.

Such a sentiment is not only a just protection to the purchasing public but is vital to the life of the industry itself.

We point with pride and satisfaction to the large amount of valuable work that has been accomplished by way of gathering data as to the best methods of propagating and cultivating the avocado, locations best suited to avocado culture, and above all, the elimination, as a commercial possibility, of a hundred or more of the less desirable and worthless varieties.

This work has been made possible through the sincere interest and unselfish co-operation of the membership of this association, and I think it is not too much to hope that the same interest and co-operative spirit will solve the problems pertaining to the marketing of the fruit.

Until we, as growers, are able to intelligently answer for ourselves the question, "When is an avocado ripe?" we will frequently be confronted by the question from a skeptical public, "Why is an avocado?"

Nature has chosen to clothe this choice gift to man in sombre garb, and the public buys the avocado, not because of its appeal to the eye, but on the recommendation of a friend, or because he has experienced for himself the pleasure and satisfaction of eating the ripe avocado at its best.

The immature avocado has not the delicate blush of the half ripe strawberry, to catch the eye of the purchaser, or the alluring "sweated gold" of the green orange, nor the flaming invitation of the unripe persimmon.

Gullible man is enticed again and again to buy these acid, puckering, disappointments, because of his inherent conviction that beauty cannot be false, but one flat, insipid avocado that has been rushed into the market prematurely will make him wary of the most tempting display her worthy sisters can make, in their modest gowns.

With some varieties of the avocado, the immature fruit mellows evenly after taken from the tree and reaches the public in a very nice condition in so far as appearance is

concerned; the flat, watery flavor or "cucumber flavor" being the only evidence that it was picked too soon.

With other varieties the skin assumes a withered, wrinkled appearance, while the flesh mellows evenly, as in the fully ripe fruit. Others never become mellow when taken from the tree too soon but, after a few days become leathery, tough and inedible.

Indetermining when an avocado is ripe, there are three different methods that suggest themselves as being helpful. Color, analysis and the dropping of fruit.

The blossoming and fruit setting season of a single tree extends over a period of from two to four months, and the marketing season of a single variety may be extended over a period of several months, where one is able to distinguish the ripe from the immature fruit.

One can readily see that the avocado that changes color as it ripens, has an advantage in this respect.

We furnished one firm with fruit from the original Sharpless tree, from October to February, each fruit reaching the consumer in its highest state of perfection. I know of no method whereby this could have been done, except through the selection made possible by the change of color of the ripening fruit.

Where the grower cannot be guided by color, chemical analysis is of great assistance in determining when to harvest his fruit.

The immature avocado is low in fat content and some growers have made the mistake of placing the bulk of their crop on the market early in the spring when the analysis showed a very low percentage of oil with its correspondingly poor flavor, while fruits allowed to stay on the tree a few months later were of good flavor and showed by analysis, a satisfactory amount of fat.

An analysis test would not be conclusive, except where a number of fruits were used in each monthly analysis.

The dropping of fruit is another indication of ripe fruit, although, perhaps, not a valuable one, as the better commercial varieties do not drop their fruit very readily.

As with the pudding, the final and conclusive test of the ripe avocado is in the eating, and in such a test I consider myself an expert, having had a table acquaintance with the avocado for over twenty years. But I am conscious of the fact that such information as I am able to offer on "How to tell a ripe avocado before it is taken from the tree," is very incomplete, as my experience in harvesting avocados has been limited to a few varieties.