

Twenty-five Years Experience With Avocados

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My association with avocados in a practical, cultural way dates back to about 1903, when I first came to California. I tasted my first Mexican avocado fruit about 1904 and planted the first avocado seeds in 1905 when the late Henry E. Huntington brought me about 25 seeds which he received from the Jonathan Club of Los Angeles, where he had eaten and enjoyed this fruit at various times. From time to time he brought out or sent me additional seeds which, together with those that I was able to collect, were planted during 1905 and 1906.

By 1907, we had about 500 seedlings in 6-inch pots, some of them as high as 6 feet. Most of them were planted out in the spring of 1908 in orchard form, about 80 trees to the acre. The soil in which they were planted was of a very deep, sandy and very porous nature. The trees began to thrive better than expected. The first trees were budded in 1910 but were only partially successful. However, the following year better results were procured. By 1912 the majority of the trees had been budded and some of them had made very good growth. Unfortunately a severely cold night in 1912 set back the planting somewhat, but not enough to discourage the attempt.

THE 1913 FREEZE

The following year, in 1913, the trees made a fine growth, but due to the severe cold when the temperature ranged between 24 and 22 for three successive nights, the entire planting was apparently lost. I was then greatly discouraged and gave up the idea of ever growing avocados in San Marino. However, to my surprise in the following year, 1914, many of the root stocks which were left in the ground sprouted from beneath the surface of the ground and produced new shoots, some of them having as many as a dozen shoots, thus forming dense bushes. No special care was taken of them for a few years but in 1917 most of them were re-budded and grafted to varieties such as Fuerte, Lyon, Spinks and various Knight varieties, and Guatemalan varieties sent in by Wilson Popenoe.

THE FREEZE OF 1922

Everything went along fairly well until the severe winter of 1922, which damaged the trees to the extent that half of the budded growth was lost. The Fuertes and Spinks

seemed to suffer the least and some of the seedlings of the Mexican type were hardly touched. However, the trees were far enough along in 1922 so that the damage did not result in the loss experienced in 1913.

The following year the trees grew so fast in the light, porous soil that certain elimination had to take place in order to admit light and sun. Some of the Fuertes at present are forty feet or more across. Financially they have not been a success for the following reasons:

1. The buds obtained were not taken from the trees with records because there were no trees with records to speak of, at that time.
2. Bud wood was in such demand that even young shoots in nursery rows were used.
3. The soil was evidently entirely too loose and too light because the trees produced enormous growth, and very few flowers and fruit.

Later, I selected another section of the ranch and planted more trees of similar varieties to find out that in the heavier, firmer soil the trees made only half as much growth and came into the flowering stage considerably sooner.

GIRDLING

I have made numerous experiments with girdling avocado trees to encourage early flowering. In one year I girdled about 25 trees, principally seedlings. In some cases the entire tree was girdled, by doing so on the trunk; in other cases, certain main limbs were girdled only. There is no question but that girdling encourages early blooming. In cases where the tree was ready to bloom that year, I found that the girdled limbs blossomed from six weeks to two months sooner than the rest of the tree which was not girdled.