

THE AVOCADO IN SPAIN, NORTH AFRICA, SICILY AND ITALY

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In 1949, while surveying the foreign, citrus-producing areas, I spent about 6 weeks in Spain and visited North Africa twice, once in the spring and again in the late summer, spending about 6 to 8 weeks in North Africa in all. I also visited the major citrus areas of Sicily and Italy.

I thought that you might be interested in my observations of avocados in these countries. In Spain, I traveled extensively in the citrus area, particularly in the southern regions from Castellon to Murcia, 125 miles to the south. While the climatic conditions of this district are very favorable to avocados, I did not see a single avocado tree during my stay in this section of Spain. I also visited the bitter orange districts in the vicinity of Sevilla, and I have been told that there is some small avocado production in this area. However, I did not see a single tree during my visit, so any plantings that exist must be on a very small scale.

In North Africa, the most extensive plantings of avocados that I saw were in the botanical gardens at Rabat. The climate of Rabat is very similar to that of San Diego and the botanical gardens are located quite close to the seashore so that the fruit grown there is not an accurate test of the commercial production that may be attained further inland. The trees observed in the botanical gardens were primarily imported varieties from the United States, and the Fuerte, Puebla, Panchoy, and Mayapan all appeared to be in vigorous health. The fruit produced had quite a long neck, but the quantity of production seemed excellent. Since these plantings were near the seashore, the tops of the trees exposed to the sea breezes showed evidence of damage from tipburn. In Morocco, the areas of citrus production are widely scattered, and it is probable that avocados could be successfully raised in the coastal area.

All of the interior regions of Morocco are subject to temperatures in summer sometimes as high as 115 degrees in the shade. This factor would probably limit the areas in which avocados could be grown successfully.

In Algeria I visited citrus districts from Oran to Algiers as well as districts slightly south of Algiers. In the botanical gardens of Algiers there is an old Mexican seedling avocado tree which must be at least 30 years of age. It is over 45 feet tall and has a trunk at least 2 feet in diameter. It apparently bears fruit and is in a vigorous state of health. This was the only avocado tree I saw in Algeria, and, again, the coastal region would seem very favorable to the production of this fruit. The warmer, dry inland area would probably be too hot.

In Tunisia, I made the same observations. While the citrus districts here are quite near the sea, there is a general hazard of strong wind storms, which would probably prevent the successful growth of avocados.

On the island of Sicily, I traveled at least halfway around the island from Palermo to Catania and then along the coast beyond Siracusa nearly to Nota. All of this area, which is sporadically devoted to the plantings of lemons, is well suited to the avocado. The climate on Sicily is quite mild, and, in summer, the temperature differences between day and night are only from 10 to 15 degrees. Along the coastal area, the humidity is also quite reasonable; and it would seem the avocado would thrive here. There are a few avocado trees on Sicily; and, in the vicinity of Palermo, I observed a few individual trees in family gardens. The varieties were not well selected; and one Fuerte tree, which reportedly bore very good crops, had been killed during the war. In September, I budded a seedling avocado at Palermo; and, although the conditions were not what I would consider favorable, I understand that the buds grew satisfactorily. The young avocado seedling trees I observed were growing very rapidly and were in vigorous health. Other avocado trees were observed near Catania at the Government Experiment Station at Acireale. Trees in this garden were tall Mexican seedlings, producing a rather dark, small, long-neck seedling. The Experiment Station people regarded this garden as a curiosity and inquired if the fruit was good to eat. Considering the very dense population on Sicily and Italy, I believe the avocado would be a very fine addition to the orchards. It could be grown in back yards, since it requires very little space and produces much needed protein food.

I found no interest in avocados in the citrus areas of Italy in the vicinity of Reggio or further north near Naples on the Sorrento peninsula where considerable plantings of lemons exist.

While I am certain that avocados could be extensively grown on Sicily, in North Africa, and on the coastal regions of Spain, there is no interest in the fruit. In European markets, avocados are a curiosity known only to those who have lived in tropical countries or traveled in the United States or to the American tourists.