

## MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE CHERIMOYA

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I first became interested in the Cherimoya about 40 years ago when we had a few trees at our home in La Habra Heights. My father and I scouted out several reportedly good trees in several areas from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Some of these trees became recognized as varieties for later propagation.

I made my first planting of 100 trees in La Habra Heights in 1933. These consisted of several varieties, namely, Whaley, Bays, Booth, McPherson, and one or two others. These trees grew well but failed to produce satisfactory crops without hand pollination of blossoms. Also I found that well drained soil was necessary and pruning very practical. This place was sold in 1944 when my wife and I purchased our present avocado property in Fallbrook where we planted two Cherimoya trees in a home fruit planting.

The development of these trees gave me renewed interest in the Cherimoya to the extent that I again planted 160 trees in 1964 on a small plot near our home. We decided to try them as a small, strictly commercial venture to prove out some theories that had been developed.

We had to raise our own trees as there were none available of the varieties that we wished to plant. After the seedling trees were a year old we grafted them to selected varieties, mostly Booth, some Chaffee and a U.C.L.A. introduction from Spain called Spanish. I also imported two varieties from Israel to try.

The trees were grown in containers and planted in place on 12' by 15' spacing with the thought in mind to prune the trees severely each year. Cherimoyas should be planted in good avocado soil where temperatures do not go below 30° at any time. They are more sensitive to frost damage than the Hass avocado. My trees were subjected to 26° weather in December 1968 which killed some of the trees outright and defoliated all. This was an unusual freeze condition in our area which I do not expect to be repeated soon. The rest of the trees have now fully recovered.

Cherimoya trees go through the growth and dormant cycle somewhat different from most trees. They make their most rapid growth in the late spring and during the warm summer months and hold their leaves until April the next season. They shed old leaves and start new growth at the same time. Therefore, pruning should be done about the end of April. I have pruned mine back more nearly like deciduous trees than normal tropical trees, cutting back the new growth to within a few inches of the last year's growth. This is desirable to keep the trees open and close to the ground to make them reachable for the hand pollination that is necessary.

The trees bloom on the old wood and also on the new growth during the months of June, July and August so pollination can proceed over that period of time. I have found

that I can set fruit on about 50% of the blossoms worked on and develop about 100 lbs. of mature fruit for every hour of time spent at being a "bee." Pollinating is best done in the early evening after 4:00 P.M. when there are blossoms in both the male and female stages and pollen can be gathered and used in one operation. I use a small container to hold pollen and a small artist's brush to distribute the pollen to the individual blossoms.

Cherimoya trees need ample water once a week, during the fast growth period, but are sensitive to excess water during the winter months. Necessary fertilizer should be applied during the summer months.

The variety, Booth, seems to suit my area and conditions best. They are easily pollinized and can carry adequate crops of quality fruit that matures in February to April. Fruit size can be from a few ounces to two pounds and are easily marketed in the quantities that reach market. I have received 500 per pound for my fruit the last two years. This is for fruit in field boxes as shipped through my avocado house, Index Mutual Assn. The fruit reaches retail in the more exclusive store outlets such as the Farmers Market in West Los Angeles.

At present Cherimoyas have no major insect pests and no control is necessary.

There are several small plantings of Cherimoyas in San Diego County and other avocado producing areas and considerable interest has been expressed by several potential growers. I would anticipate a modest increase in plantings but feel that results will be highly variable as they do need some special conditions to be profitable to the grower. The main problem will be the "bee" work that can produce practical quantities of fruit per tree and per acre.

I feel that a limited increase in production of quality fruit would establish a general market for Cherimoyas in specialty shops and at a price that would be attractive to the growers.