

The "Guatemalan Criollos"

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Introduction

This large group of avocados, the so-called "Guatemalan Criollos," constitute the base of the Guatemalan Race. Therefore, in our opinion, it is a very important group. We agree with the designation of these avocados as *Persea americana* var. *guatemalensis* as suggested by Bergh in 1975 (1).

The "Guatemalan Criollos" are characterized by their round-oblate shaped fruit, and by the thick and hard skin or shell. The seed is also always oblate. Most of the fruit are dark green; however, some purple-green ones are also found. Trees are usually very tall and vigorous. In the last ten years, during our collecting in Central America and Mexico (2, 4), we have used the designation, "Criollo," meaning native. We believe that *Persea steyermarkii*, *P. nubigena*, and Aguacate de Mico all may be involved in the ancestry of the Guatemalan race. All of these wild types from Central America (primarily found in Guatemala) have fruit resembling a primitive Guatemalan type.

The distribution of these Criollos is mainly in the Guatemalan highlands, in the western part of the country (as will be pointed out later in relation to the centers), then into Apaneca and Nahuizalco in western El Salvador (3), and to south eastern Mexico as far as the Veracruz-Oaxaca state borders. In a recent collecting trip (June 1980) in Mexico, Schieber was interested to see how far into Mexico the Guatemalan Criollos are found. Following "La Ventosa" trail from Paso Real, down to the Pacific ocean in Tehuantepec, he found trees near the boundary of the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca, in the region of Jesus Carraña from Paso Real down to Matias Romero and Juchitan.

It is of striking interest that this "La Ventosa" trail was the one followed by the Spanish conquistadores when Cortez sent Don Pedro de Alvarado (one of his captains) to conquer Guatemala. It is also the path the old Mayas followed in their "wanderings" (Schieber, unpublished). During the last decade, we have given prime importance to this group within the collecting program of the University of California.

Ecology

The "Guatemalan Criollos" are avocados that grow in what is known in Guatemala as "la tierra fría" (the cold country). These thrive well at altitudes of 4,500 feet to 8,000 feet above sea level. Some trees have been found at 8,500 feet elevation where frost occurs during the winter months in the Guatemalan highlands. It is here where collections could be made in search of "cold resistance."

In Mexico, we have encountered many trees at elevations between 5,000 and 6,000 feet; and in El Salvador, mainly at 5,000 feet in the western highlands of Ahuachapán (3).



Figure 1. "Guatemalan Criollo" tree. G. A. Zentmyer in Agua Escondida overlooking another center, Cerro de Oro, at Lake Atitlán.

Important Centers

As stated in the introduction, the distribution of the Criollos in Guatemala is in the western highlands. It is interesting to point out that only a few trees grow in the entire eastern part of Guatemala, even though ecological conditions are favorable for Criollos there.

Guatemala

The important centers, located in Central and Western Guatemala, are: Department of Sacatepequez: Antigua, Santa María de Jesús, Ciudad Vieja, Alotenango, San Juan Sacatepequez, and San Pedro Sacatepequez.

Department of Chimaltenango: Chimaltenango, Patzicía, Patzún, Tecpán, San José' Poaquil, Sta. Apolonia, Comalapa.

Department of Solóla: Solóla, Concepción, Monte Mercedes, San José Xacaya, Agua Escondida, Cerro de Oro, Santiago Atitlán, San Lucas, San Pedro, San Juan, San Pablo, San Jorge.

Department of Quiché: Quiché, Chichicastenango, Chiché, Sacapulas, Zacualpa.

Department of Huehuetenango: Aguacatan, Todos Santos, San Pedro Necta.

Department of Totonicapán: Momostenango, San Francisco El Alto.



Figure 2. Guatemalan Criollo tree collection Gu-67 near road to Godinez-Sololá, Guatemala.

El Salvador

In the Republic of El Salvador, two centers are of importance: Apaneca in the Department of Ahuachapán, Juayua, and the Nahuizalco region.

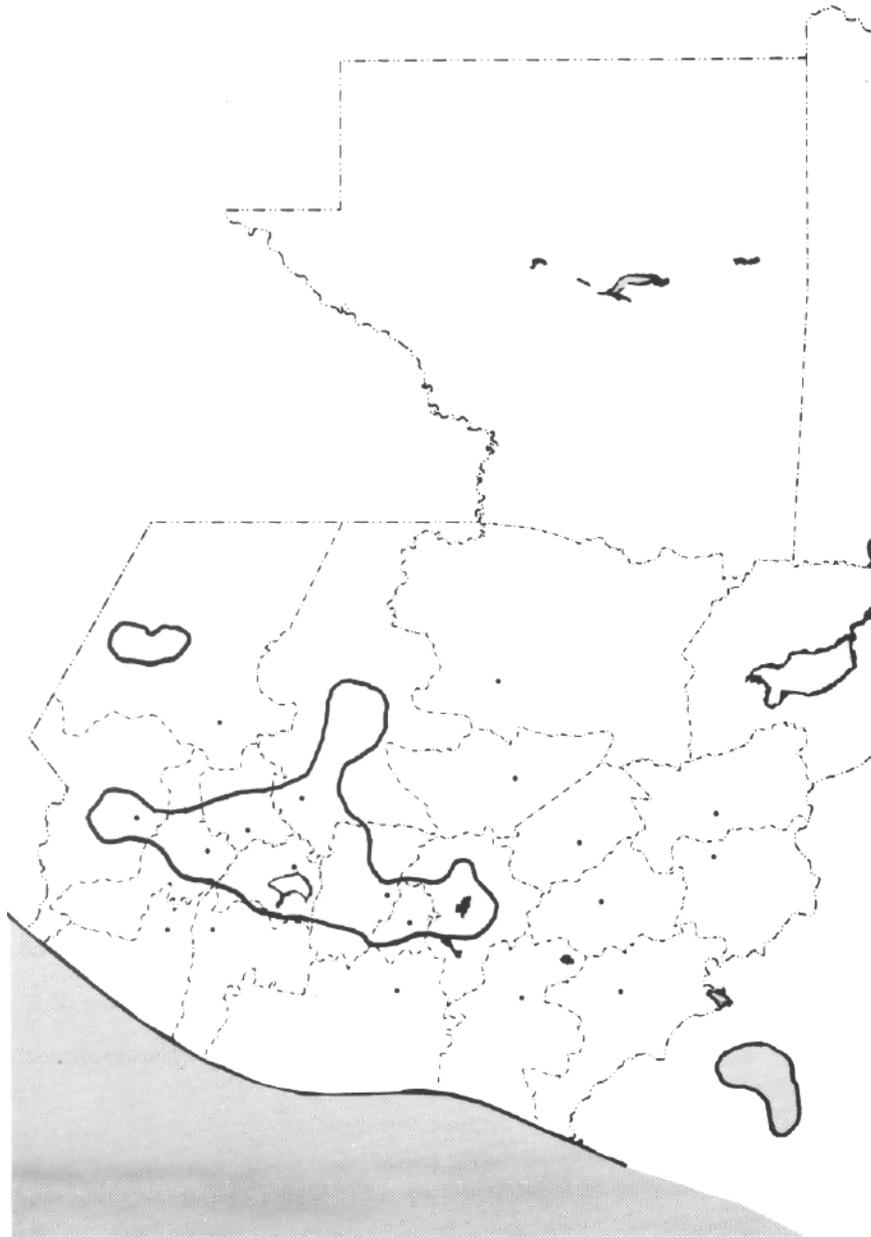


Figure 3. "Guatemalan Criollo" collection Gu-270, from Sacapulas, Guatemala. Note the large oblate seed.



Figure 4. "Guatemalan Criollos" ready to go (in a net) to the market. Photographed in Patzicía-Guatemala.

MAPA DE LA REPUBLICA DE GUATEMALA



Regions of "Guatemalan Criollos" in western Guatemala and in western El Salvador.

Mexico

Chiapas State: Comitán, Amatenango, Aguacatenango, San Andres (near Chamula), and the Veracruz-Oaxaca border.

The "Guatemalan Criollos" and the Markets

Many of our collections of this group were made in the local native markets. Others are from marked trees that were of interest and were vigorous. The native markets take place twice a week in the Guatemalan highlands and also in Chiapas (that has also an Indian population, and years ago belonged to Guatemala). The two markets a week are of great importance to any Mayan community. Early in the morning (4 o'clock), the natives will start to walk to their market to reach it at 7:00 in the morning. They carry all kinds of vegetables, fruits, flowers, chickens, and other produce. Among these many times are avocados that belong to the "Guatemalan Criollos" and that come from very remote regions, from localities that have never seen a car, without roads, having only trails.

Natives will then be in the market trading their products the entire morning. It is also a social event. Avocados are found almost every market day, and among these mainly the "Guatemalan Criollos." Western Guatemala, where heavy populations of trees exist, belonged to the Cakchiquel Kingdom, where today the same Mayas live. Here in the markets, the word you hear constantly is "Oj" for avocado, the "Guatemalan Criollo" avocado.

This hard shelled avocado is usually very tasty; if you think not, ask the swarms of tourists that taste these as guacamole in the international hotels, ask the Guatemalan and Mexican house-wives, ask the "wandering hippies" that storm the markets. The avocado is an important food, also, for the Mayan people that eat these with their eternal corn "tortilla."

Literature Cited

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