



Growing Avocados in the Sacramento Valley Part I - Introduction

A Three Part Series



Ah, the avocado! Its smooth, buttery taste - delicious! And nutritionally? The avocado is unique among fruit trees. It has significant nutritional benefits due to its high mineral, vitamin, and protein content and high monounsaturated fat content - which help to lower "bad" cholesterol. Avocados contain all the essential amino acids, which means they are a fruit based source of balanced protein nutrition, an unusual feature.

We think of the avocado as a sub-tropical fruit. But could we grow it here in the Sacramento Valley? The answer is a qualified yes. The best tasting avocado I ever had was one I grew in my garden here in Glenn County. To help us understand how to successfully grow our own delicious avocados, we need a little back ground.

Wild avocados can be found in regions of Mexico and neighboring Guatemala. In fact, the avocado has evolved into three distinct horticultural races or types, depending on where they came from. The Mexican type, or cold tolerant type, developed in the highlands near Puebla, Mexico. As the name implies, most of these varieties are cold-tolerant and could do well in the Sacramento Valley. The Guatemalan type is a subtropical tree and would not be expected to survive in a cold climate. A third type, the West Indies, is not adapted to grow anywhere in California, and, for our purposes, need not enter into the discussion. Both Mexican and Guatemalan types are grown commercially in California.

There are no known fertility barriers between the botanical races. Hybridization occurs readily whenever trees of different races are growing in proximity. This has resulted in many cultivated varieties - all with different abilities to survive in a cold climate.

The Fuerte is a cultivar that led California production for many years. It is a Mexican x Guatemalan pear shaped natural hybrid that is green at maturity. The Hass, which currently leads California production, is generally regarded as a Guatemalan type and is black at maturity and rounder than the Fuerte. But what variety is best for the Sacramento Valley? These two commercial varieties do well in southern California, and can survive with considerable help in the Sacramento Valley, but are not recommended for our area. We will discuss other options in Part III of this series.

Many avocado varieties will do very well in the Sacramento Valley for many years, but then, every once in a while, you will get a sub 25 degree prolonged nighttime freeze that will kill most young avocado trees and older trees back to the root, so we need to grow only the most cold tolerant varieties. The varieties with the best chance of doing well in the Sacramento Valley are the cold tolerant Mexican types, or a hybrid of a Mexican type.

There are several varieties that will survive (sometimes needing help from the gardener) the cold of the Sacramento Valley, but there are other considerations - size of tree, fruit characteristics, and flower type of the tree - that will guide us in our selection for the home garden. We will discuss these as well as some gardener interventions in Part II and III of this series.

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