

Avocado History

Avocado (*Persea Americana* Mill.) is considered a fruit and has in recent years gained worldwide recognition for its versatility and dietary value. Although relatively new in commerce and the culinary arts, this unique fruit has been appreciated and utilized for at least 9,000 years around its center of origin in the Americas.¹ Over the last 40 years, international trade in avocados has increased four-fold and supplies are available year-round.

The avocado originates from the middle-Americas and is found native from the coast to high altitude forests, some growing at altitudes exceeding 9,000 ft., and covering a wide range of climates and soil types. This has given rise to great genetic diversity and adaptability and provides great promise for the selection of future varieties.

Fast forward to 1871, when Judge R.B. Ord of Santa Barbara successfully introduced avocados to the U.S. with trees from Mexico. By the early 1900s, growers were seeing the avocado's commercial potential and ever since growers, enthusiasts and researchers have been hunting for improved varieties.

The first commercial avocado orchards were planted in California in the early 1900s. Most of the pioneering research on avocado orchard management technology was also initiated in California. Did you know that Hass Avocados originated in California?

The Hass variety, popular worldwide, originated in the small Southern California suburb of La Habra Heights. The Mother Hass Tree (1926-2002) was tended for, and named after postman Rudolph Hass, who patented the variety in August of 1935. Today, over 95% of avocados sold in the United States are the Hass variety, and all Hass Avocados grown around the world can trace their roots to this very special California tree.

A search through the industry's foremost annals, in particular the California Avocado Society Yearbook, reveals that many new selections of avocado were made in the industry's infancy and over subsequent years but few had commercial significance. By the 1950s around 25 different varieties of avocados were being commercially packed and shipped in California, with 'Fuerte' accounting for more than two-thirds of the production. Even though 'Hass' was discovered in the early 1930s and patented by Rudolph Hass in 1935, it was not until large-scale industry expansion occurred in the late 1970s that 'Hass' replaced 'Fuerte' as the leading California variety.

Today, California is the leading producer of domestic avocados and home to about 90 percent of the nation's crop. Most California Avocados are grown commercially on more than 50,000 acres in the coastal regions of central to southern California from Morro Bay to San Diego by nearly 3,000 growers.

California Avocados are grown year-round. A single, mature California Avocado tree can produce up to 200 to 300 pieces of fresh fruit each year, although most average around 60 pounds or 150 pieces of fruit. The avocado tree, however, alternates bearing. This means that

¹ R.J. Knight, Jr., "Chapter 1: Introduction (Evolutionary Aspects-'Evo-devo' and 'Evo-eco')", *The Avocado: Botany, Production and Uses*, eds. A.W. Whiley, B. Schaffer and B.N. Wolstenholme, 2nd Edition

the tree may produce a large crop one year, and then produce a small crop the following year. There are lots of variables that influence this.

Avocados are consumed from the Americas to Asia, in sandwiches and salads in the United States, to sushi in Japan, and to dessert drinks in the Philippines.

What Type of Fruit is an Avocado?

An avocado is a single-seeded berry, according to botanical classification of fruits.

The pear-shaped avocado is botanically a berry, with a leathery skin, edible smooth texture pulp and a large, inedible central seed. An average avocado tree produces about 150 avocados annually each averaging around 7.5 ounces.