

# AVOCADO TREES

## Care and General information

Excerpts taken from:

### **Home Fruit Production - Avocado**

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## Introduction

Avocado is a medium to large evergreen tree with large, leathery, deep green leaves, and is often found in landscapes across South Texas. The popularity of its fruit, particularly in Mexican food dishes, and its tropical appearance have spurred considerable interest in growing avocados at home.

## Climate

The most limiting factor to success with avocado trees is severe cold, therefore ideal for growing in the Coastal Bend, however as a tropical to subtropical tree it is best adapted to relatively frost-free areas.

## Soil and Site Selection

Avocado trees are adapted to most soil types found in South Texas, provided the soil has good internal drainage. The tree will not perform well in poorly drained soils, nor will it tolerate flooding. The planting site should be chosen with cold and wind protection in mind. Generally, the south or southeast side of the house is the warmest location in a residential site. Because it can become a large tree, it should be planted no closer than 8 to 10 feet from the house.

## Planting

Nursery container Avocados are grafted and be planted deeper than normal so that the graft is at or below ground level. In addition, soil should be mounded around the trunk as the tree grows to assure that the graft union is below ground.

Newly-planted trees should be staked for support and most require shading during the first several months. A burlap-covered cage about a foot higher than the tree is commonly placed around the tree in the Valley for both shading and wind protection. In multiple plantings, avocados should be spaced 15 to 25 feet from each other and from other large trees.

## **Culture**

The elimination of weed and grass competition is critical during the first two or three years after planting. Once competition is eliminated, organic mulches can effectively prevent further problems.

## **Irrigation**

Avocado irrigation is no different from citrus or other fruit and nut trees-- water slowly, deeply and thoroughly. Avoid wasting water to runoff and do not allow water to stand around the tree for more than a few hours.

## **Fertilization**

Ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) applied February, May and September.

year 1 – 5.5 Tablespoons each month

year 2 – 1/3 cup each month

year 3 – ½ cup each month

Thereafter, apply one to two cups per year per inch of trunk diameter, *also split into equal applications in February, May and September*

Example – diameter = 6”

1 cup x 6 = 6 cups, therefore 2 cups each month

**Pruning** is unnecessary for growing trees, but freeze-damaged wood should be cut out in the spring. If only limb damage occurs, wait until regrowth commences and cut back to live tissue. If the tree is killed to the ground, cut it off at ground level--the regenerated tree will be naturally multi-trunked or the excess sprouts can be removed to permit only one to reform the tree.

## **Cold Protection**

Deep planting and subsequent soil mounding around the trunk are the best assurances that the avocado will survive a severe freeze, even if the top is

completely killed. When a severe freeze is being forecast, mound additional soil around the trunk for extra protection, then water thoroughly two or three days before the cold weather is expected.

Young trees can be draped (not wrapped) with a blanket, quilt, tarp or even plastic during the freeze event. The corners of the covering should be pulled outward and anchored to the ground--it is not necessary that the covering reach to the ground. Any additional practical heat source under the tented tree will probably save even the leaves. Examples include incandescent lights, decorative lights, electric heaters and camp lanterns or stoves.

### **Production, Maturity and Use**

Grafted varieties will produce a few fruit two years after establishment (which is defined as the tree having made significant growth after planting). Mature trees can produce two to three or more bushels of avocados with good management, depending upon variety. 'Lula' and most other hybrids mature in September or October. Storage on-tree is common, and 'Lula' will store on-tree into January because of cooler temperatures.

Avocado fruits do not ripen on the tree--they must be harvested and held for several days. The optimum temperature range for ripening includes the cooler range of most home air conditioning settings. Avocado maturity, if unknown, can be easily determined, as the fruit is mature when it will soften to good eating quality. Pick a couple of fruit and set them on the kitchen counter (out of direct sun). A mature fruit will soften within three to eight days. If the fruit don't soften, try again every week or so with new fruit until you achieve softening. When fruit softens, check it for eating quality. Summer-maturing avocados will begin to drop heavily because of disease as they mature. Some types do not always soften well under Texas conditions. For the most part, avocados are consumed fresh, alone or in salads, dips, appetizers, guacamole and pico de gallo. Overripe fruit can be pureed and frozen for later use, particularly for avocado cream soup and dips.

### **Problems, Disease and Insect Pests**

The most common problem of avocados in Texas is tip burn and marginal necrosis caused by water stress and salinity, which is most prevalent during hot, dry weather. This problem is most acute on Mexican-race

seedlings and rootstocks; it can be tempered somewhat by more uniform and regular watering.

Some avocados are prone to complete defoliation at the time of flowering. New leaves will develop almost immediately, so there is no cause for concern.

The most serious disease of avocados is anthracnose, which is primarily a disease of fruit nearing maturity. It starts as circular, sunken brown to black spots that are quite small. With time, the spots can enlarge to half an inch or more and are prone to cause the fruit to crack horizontally and vertically across the spot. Anthracnose is particularly severe on thin-skinned types, but rarely causes significant losses on 'Lula' and other thick-skinned fruits.

Other fungal diseases such as cercospora spot, powdery mildew and scab are rarely encountered in Texas, but are serious problems in the humid tropics. Few insects have been documented on Texas avocados, although mites sometimes occur on the foliage. None has been severe enough to warrant control measures. Possums apparently thrive on mature avocado fruit and will climb the tree to feed in the absence of fruit on the ground.

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