

Avocados - grafted trees, variety selection, planting, watering, fertilizer.

Have you always wanted to grow your own avocados, but thought they required constant care and attention? Well worry not. A grafted avocado tree of a good variety for the Valley, when planted in a suitable area, actually requires less attention than most other kinds of fruit trees. In last week's avocado article: cold tolerance, salt tolerance, disease-resistance, fruit size and quality, and season of production were factors presented for your consideration before choosing a avocado variety. Your Texas Certified Nursery Professional will be happy to give you a complete rundown of all these factors, and can help you select the best variety of delicious, abundant avocados for your need and yard situation. In this article week's article on avocados; tree selection, variety selection, planting, watering, fertilizing and insect treatment will be presented.

Grafted Trees. Select only grafted avocado trees. Although the seed in any avocado will usually germinate, it can take many years before a seedling will bear fruit, and the quality of the fruit will probably be inferior. Using only grafted trees helps overcome these maturity and quality problems, as well as making for a tree that is less susceptible to root rot and salt damage. A grafted avocado tree is one which has a root rot resistant and somewhat salt tolerant root stock upon which the fine horticultural variety you desire is physically grafted. Grafted trees are professionally developed and maintained in a disease and insect free state and are generally available at your local nursery or garden center. Ask you Texas Certified Nursery Professional for information on the varieties they sell.

Varieties. Choose only varieties that are Mexican or a cross between Mexican and the Guatemalan races. Probably the best varieties for south Texas are Lula, Pancho, Hass, Winter Mexican, Bacon and Fuerte. Lula is probably the most popular variety here in the Valley because of its high salt tolerance and its excellent production of very large, high-quality fruits, that ripen in winter and early spring. Hass is another very popular variety, that is somewhat smaller than Lula, with pebbly black-skinned fruit which ripen in spring and summer months, and is a little more cold-hardy than the Lula, but not as salt tolerant.

Planting. Spring is probably the best time to plant an avocado. Plant the tree at the same level as it was in the container or a little higher provided you cover the root ball with soil so it does not dry out. When planting be sure to use plenty of peat moss or soil conditioner and a little gypsum mixed with your soil, to insure good drainage and to help lower the pH. Many experienced avocado growers like to build a wind-block out of stakes and burlap to help reduce some of the strong winds and the sun until the tree becomes established.

Watering. Water is the most important factor in properly caring for your avocado. Above all remember that too much water is more dangerous than not

enough. Feeder roots, the ones that are sensitive to overly wet soil, are usually concentrated in the top 15 inches of the soil, so this area should be allowed to dry partially between waterings, especially with established or mature trees. Here in the Valley, deep waterings every two to four weeks are usually plenty for established avocado trees. Young trees will need to be watered more frequently, probably every week or two through the first summer until established. Avocado trees will usually become established after one year.

Fertilizer. Through the warmer months, from early spring to late summer, avocado trees should be fertilized monthly with small amounts of a complete fertilizer, such as Valley Green Acid Mix. It is also a good idea to add some Soil Acidifier when you fertilize, to keep the soil pH level from getting too high. A soil pH of 5.5 to 6.5 is ideal but some varieties like Lula are more tolerant of alkaline soils than others. **DO NOT** fertilize while the tree is in bloom, since just a little too much fertilizer can make the blooms drop off, meaning no avocados.

Insects. Bugs are not usually much of a problem on avocados, but if you notice some, take a sample of the damaged foliage and the insect, if you can catch it, to your Texas Certified Nursery Professional. This Professional can recommend the proper treatment but you must follow all label directions for applying insecticides.

(Information source: Cecile Waugh of Waugh's Nursery, McAllen, TX)
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