



Avocado Selection, Planting and Care

Avocados are beautiful trees with delicious, nutritious fruit. And once established, they are fairly tough trees. However, many avocados fail during the first 12 months due to poor soil drainage, sunburn or improper irrigation habits. Follow these easy guidelines for success.

Varieties of Avocados for the Houston Area Climate:

- **Opal®** originated in Uvalde, Texas. This is a cold hardy Mexican avocado. The medium sized pear-shaped fruit is very rich tasting. The skin is green in color.
- **Wilma™** originated near Pearsall, Texas. This is a cold hardy Mexican avocado. The fruit is large and has a very good flavor. The skin is black in color.
- **Fantastic** Avocado is green, paper thin skin, most cold hardy of all the Mexican avocados. The fruit has a creamy texture with fantastic flavors. Eat skin and all. It is a vigorous growing beautiful tree.
- **Joey** avocado was founded by Joey Ricers in Uvalde, Texas. The fruit is medium in size and egg shaped. It has excellent flavor. This skin is purple-black in color. Heavy bearer.
- **Poncho** avocado has a medium-large green fruit, cold hardy Mexican avocado.
- **Mexicola Grande** has a glossy, near black, thin, easy to peel skin. The flesh is creamy and almost delicate in texture and has a flavor that is rich, nutty and smooth. Mexicola Grande avocados weigh an average of four ounces to eight ounces. The fruit ripens from August to October. The tree is fast growing and very cold tolerant to 18 or 20 degrees and grows to a height of 25 to 30 feet and 15 to 20 feet wide.

Planting Avocados

- **Select a large sunny spot with good drainage.** An avocado tree can grow to 30 feet tall and 15' to 20' across. Of course, you can prune them to be smaller.
- If you purchase your tree late in the year, keep it in the pot until late March and bring it inside if there is going to be a frost or freeze.
- Build a raised area at least 3' in diameter and about 1' high. Form a bowl within the raised area and plant in that bowl. When you are finished planting, the graft will be just above the soil line at the bottom of the bowl.
- Over the course of 18 months to 3 years, periodically add small amounts of soil into the bowl until the graft is completely underground; this will provide freeze protection.
- **Avocados need protection from both frosts and the sun for the first couple of years.**
- 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 or quilt (never plastic) during the freeze event. The corners of the covering should be pulled outward and anchored to the ground. Once the avocados have a couple of year's growth, they will not need this protection.

- Avocados have almost no brown, woody bark like other plants. Notice that the stems and main branches of your tree are bright green. **This green tissue on the stems and bark is very susceptible to sunburn.** Young trees do not have enough leaves to shade this bark and some special care should be given during this first year or two. One option is to paint the green trunk and main branches with a whitewash. This can be easily made by diluting a white latex paint with an equal part of water and painting it on the trunk and branches, but not the leaves.
- Another option is to build a simple structure of metal, wood or PVC to which can be attached a cloth that will keep the mid-day and afternoon sun off the trunk.
- When planting, assure quick establishment and long term health for your avocado tree by using liquid Root Activator, Rhizanova inoculant and VitaMulch. After one year of growth, use a balanced fertilizer such as MicroLife Citrus four times yearly, being sure that all fertilizing is done after blooming when fruit is set.
- **After drainage, proper irrigation is the most critical factor effecting the establishment of your new avocado.** Unless drainage is quick, even the most careful attention to watering will not help. Over-irrigation can induce root rot, which is the most common cause of avocado failure. To test to see if irrigation is necessary, dig a hole a few inches deep and test the soil by squeezing. If it is moist (holds together), do not irrigate; if it crumbles in the hand or is obviously dry, it may be watered. Never enter winter with wet soil. Avocado trees may not need irrigation during the winter rainy season, but watch for prolonged mid-winter dry spells.

Harvesting

- **An avocado tree will produce a few fruit 2 or 3 years after establishment** if it is a grafted variety, has grown well, and has been protected during the winters. With good management, mature trees can produce 2, 3, or more bushels of avocados, depending upon the variety.
- **Avocado fruits do not ripen on the tree**--they must be harvested and held for several days before they are ready to be consumed. To determine whether the avocados are mature, pick a couple of fruit and set them inside the house out of direct sun. A mature fruit will soften in 3 to 8 days. If the fruit doesn't soften, pick fruit again every week or so until they soften. Check soft fruit for eating quality.