



All About Avocados

Avocados grow great here along the Central Coast! The trees get as large as twenty feet and are evergreen. The fruit is very popular in Mexican Dishes. The tree is tropical in appearance. Best of all, there is NOTHING that compares to a home grown avocado!

The most limiting factor to success with avocado trees is severe cold. Avocado is a subtropical tree that, with some exceptions, is best adapted to relatively frost-free areas. Once established, most varieties handle frost better.

Avocado trees prefer well drained soils. Where you plant should be determined with cold protection in mind. Generally, the northeast side of the house is the warmest location in a residential site.

There are three distinct horticultural races of avocado -- West Indian, Guatemalan and Mexican -- plus hybrids between them. Most of the varieties we sell are hybrids between the Guatemalan and Mexican varieties. Some of the most popular we recommend are as follows:

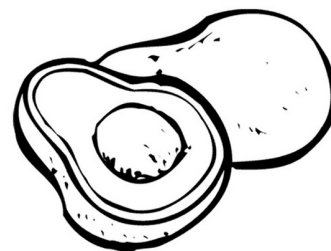
Zutano – This hybrid bears a pear shaped; medium size fruit with light green skin. Oil content is moderate at 15 – 22%. This is a good choice for cooler climates.

Bacon – The fruit is pear shaped and medium to large in size. The skin is green. Oil content is slightly higher than the zutano at nearer 18-24%. Also a good choice for cooler climates.

Fuerte – This is a natural hybrid from Atlixco, Mexico. It is pear shaped and bears medium size fruit. It is the best choice for Monterey County as it is more frost tolerant than others. Oil content runs near 17%. It is a very productive tree that can tend to bear biennially.

Hass – This is the most popular avocado thanks to aggressive marketing to consumers. It has good shelf life as well. The fruit is pear shaped and is medium size. Skin is dark green. Oil content between 18 and 22%. The Hass can be more frost sensitive than others in Monterey County.

Lil Cado – This is the only true dwarf avocado variety. It is a consistent bearer of good quality, green-skinned fruit. It is an excellent choice for small backyards or for use as a container specimen or as espalier. Oil content runs near 18%.



Mexicola Grande – Like the Fuerte, this is another great variety for Monterey County and the Central Coast. Fruit is small in size, has great flavor and is pear shaped. The skin is thin and near black. The tree is fast growing and very cold tolerant to 18 or 20 degrees. Oil content is between 20 and 22%. While most avocados don't need a pollinizer, the Mexicola is great for pollinating.

Stewart – Similar to the Mexicola, the skin is thin and near black. The Stewart boasts slightly larger pear shaped fruit. The fruit has an outstanding nutty flavor and it is a consistent bearer. Oil

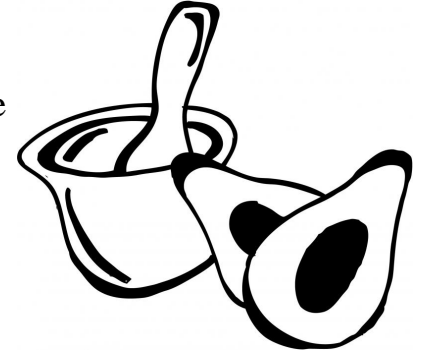
content is high near 20%. The tree is cold hardy and can act as a great pollinator.

The flowering habit of avocados is unique in that the flowers are perfect, having both male and female organs, but the parts do not function together. Some varieties have a better fruit set than others. Most varieties are self fruiting. That said, the best research indicates that adding a “pollinator” for consistent fruit set is not a bad idea.

Avocados do not come true from seed, and seedlings may take up to 10 to 15 years to fruit. Most trees are grafted too. This helps promote disease resistance while also controlling size. When planting, always use a high quality planting mix such as Gold Rush or Bumper Crop. A starter fertilizer is recommended as is B-1 rooting solution. It is common practice to plant the tree deeper than normal so that the graft is at or below ground level. In addition, soil is mounded around the trunk as the tree grows to assure that the graft union is below ground. Thus, trees killed to the ground by severe cold will regenerate from varietal wood rather than from rootstock. Newly-planted trees should be staked for support and may require some protection from the wind.

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. Avocado irrigation is no different from citrus or other fruit and nut trees--water slowly, deeply and thoroughly. Fertilization of avocados is key. A high quality product like Master Nursery Citrus and Avocado Food will do well. Fertilization should be applied monthly from February to September. Pruning is unnecessary for growing trees, but freeze-damaged wood should be cut out in the spring.

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 frost fabric during the freeze event. Any additional practical heat source under the fabric will help as well. Examples include incandescent lights, decorative lights, electric heaters and camp lanterns or stoves.



The most common problem with avocados is tip burn and marginal necrosis caused by water stress and salinity. 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.

If you have any questions or need help, just ask one of the professionals here at McShane’s Nursery and Landscape Supply.

If you would like to see more of these helpful handouts about other gardening subjects go to **www.mcshanesnursery.com** and see our whole free library of them!