a NATURAL FARM
& EDUCATIONAL CENTER

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AVOCADO CARE GUIDE

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COLD HARDY GRAFTED AVOCADOS

Avocados were first introduced in Florida in 1833 & are sometimes called alligator pears.

AVOCADO TYPES

There are 3 major groups of avocado cultivars: Mexican (small fruits), Guatemalan (small long fruits. Mid-season & Late varieties) & West Indian (big South Fla green fruits. Most early variety). Hybrids between Guatemalan & West Indians are also common.

VARIETIES OF BLACK SKIN AVOCADOS

1. BRAZOS BELLE - Hardy to 15-18 degrees, matures in October November, long medium-large fruit
2. JOEY - Hardy to 15-18 degrees, matures in September October, long medium size oval fruit
3. LILA - Hardy to 18-20 degrees, matures in September October, Medium size fruit
4. WINTER MEXICAN - Hardy to 20-22 degrees, matures in December January, pear-shape fruit
5. MEXICOLA GRANDE - Hardy to 18-20 degrees, matures August to October, small pear-shaped fruit
6. BROGDON - Hardy to 24 degrees, matures August to October, medium sized pear-shaped fruit
7. FLORIDA HASS - Hardy to 26 degrees, matures in September, October, medium sized 4" pear-shaped fruit

VARIETIES OF GREEN SKIN AVOCADOS

1. FANTASTIC - Hardy to 15-18 degrees, matures August to November, Pear-shaped fruit
2. PONCHO - Hardy to 18 degrees, matures August to November, medium to large fruit
3. CHOQUETTE - Hardy to 24 degrees, matures January to March, very large oval shaped fruit
4. DAY - Hardy to 26 degrees, matures July to September, club-shaped fruit
5. HALL - Hardy to 26 degrees, matures in November December, big pear-shaped fruit

View our site's Avocado page for in-depth descriptions of our Avocado cultivars.
www.anaturalfarm.com/avocado

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GRAFTED TREES AND TREES GROWN FROM SEEDS

Avocado trees can easily be grown from seeds/fruits you get at the grocery stores. Unfortunately those trees will take 8 to 20 years to fruit in your garden. The trees offered at A Natural Farm have been grafted at a young age and allows the trees to produce as early as the first or second year from when the trees are planted. Not only is fruiting earlier, but the root stock is better suited for Florida soils. When growing from seed, many times these are Avocados grown in California or Mexico, with different climates and soil structures, ill suited for our Florida conditions.

SOILS

Avocado trees do not tolerate flooding or poorly drained soils but are adapted to many types of well-drained soils. Continuously wet or flooded conditions often result in decreased growth and yields, nutrient deficiency symptoms, dieback, and sometimes tree death. Under these conditions, trees are highly susceptible to root infection by Phytophthora fungi.

In Florida avocado trees grow well and produce satisfactory yields in sandy and limestone soils. If your planting spot is subject to potential flooding, create a soil mound and plant your tree on top of this mound.

SITE SELECTION AND SPACING

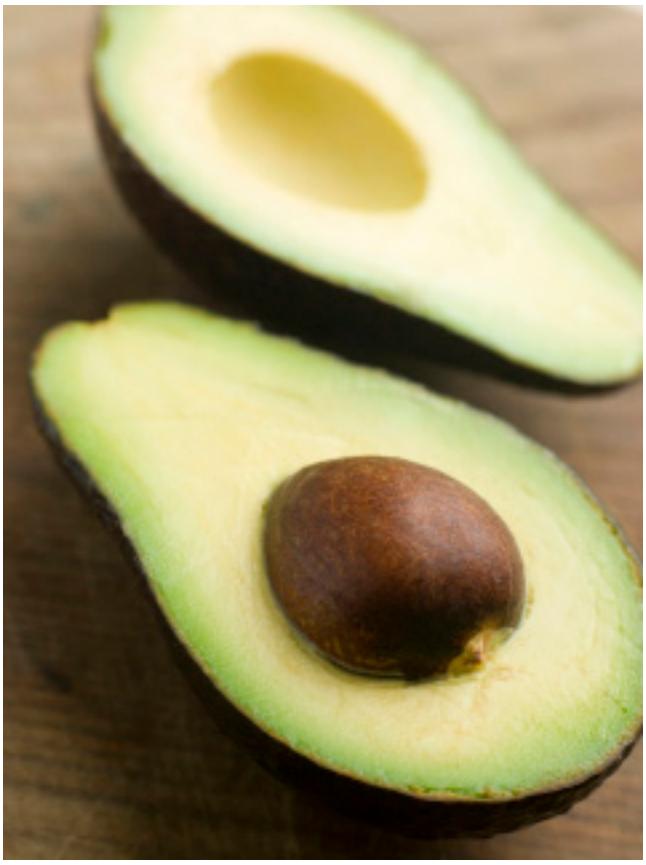
In general, avocado trees should be planted in full sun for best growth and fruit production. Select a part of the landscape away from other trees, buildings and structures and powerlines. Remember avocado trees can become very large if not pruned to contain their size. Select the warmest area of the landscape that does not flood (or remain wet) after typical summer rainfall events.

If you plant more than one avocado tree, keep a spacing of about 20' between the trees

PLANTING IN SANDY SOILS

Prior to digging a hole, remove a 3 to 10 ft diameter ring of grass sod. Dig a hole 2 to 3 times the diameter and 2 times as deep as the container the avocado tree has come in. Making a large hole loosens the soil adjacent to the new tree making it easy for the roots to expand into the adjacent soil. It is not necessary to apply fertilizer, topsoil, or compost to the hole.

Backfill the hole with some of the native soil removed to make the hole. Carefully remove the tree from the container and place it in the hole so that the top of the soil media of the container is level with or slightly above the surrounding soil level. Fill soil in around the tree roots and tamp slightly to remove air pockets. Immediately water the soil around the tree and tree roots and stake the tree to protect it against strong winds until the roots are strong enough to hold the tree in the native soil.



FERTILIZATION

In Florida, young trees should be fertilized every 1 to 2 months during the first year, beginning with ¼ lb of fertilizer and increasing to 1 lb per tree by the end of that first year.

After this first year, 3 or 4 applications per year in amounts proportionate to the increasing size of the tree are sufficient but, not to exceed 20 lbs per tree per year. We recommend using an organic fertilizer like the one we currently use made out of composted turkey manure with a formulation of 6 - 2 - 6 + Mycorrhizae fungi and add a source of minerals like of Azomite (natural product mined in the US).

You can also give your trees worm castings if you have access to some. If your yard in located in areas with high soil pH (mostly South Fla), you will have to bring a source of Iron to your tree to prevent Iron deficiency in late spring & summer.

IRRIGATION

Newly planted trees should be watered at planting and every other day for the first week or so and then 1 to 2 times a week for the first couple of months. During prolonged dry periods (e.g., 5 or more days of little to no rainfall) newly planted and young avocado trees (first 3 years) should be well watered twice a week. Once the rainy season arrives, irrigation frequency may be reduced or stopped.

Once avocado trees are 4 or more years old irrigation will be beneficial to plant growth and crop yields during prolong dry periods. Especially during the period from bloom and through fruit development.

INSECT PESTS

Many insect pests attack avocados, but they seldom limit fruit production significantly. Insect infestations are not predictable and control measures are justified only when large populations occur. Currently, the most important insect pests in Florida are:

Avocado Looper (Epimecis detexta), Pyriform Scale (Protopulvinaria pyriformis), Dictyospermum Scale (Chrysomphalus dictyospermi), Avocado Red Mites (Oligonychus yothersi), Borers (e.g., Ambrosia beetles, Xylosandrus sp.), Avocado Lace Bugs (Acysta perseae), Red-banded Thrips (Selenothrips rubrocinctus)

DISEASES

Several diseases can affect avocado trees but the main way to prevent or control those diseases is to not plant your trees in a spot prone to flooding or remaining wet after heavy summer rains. Another disease affecting avocado trees is called Laurel wilt. It is a deadly disease of redbay trees and other tree species in the laurel family. The disease is caused by a fungus that is introduced into host trees by a nonnative insect, the redbay ambrosia beetle. This disease only affect old trees and

should not be a problem for your young backyard trees.

LAWN CARE, WEED CONTROL, AND MULCH

Avocado trees in the home landscape are susceptible to trunk injury caused by lawn mowers and weed eaters. Never hit the tree trunk with lawn mowing equipment and never use a weed eater near the tree trunk. Mechanical damage to the trunk of the tree will result in weakening the tree and if severe enough can cause the tree to dieback or die. Do not use weed and feed products around or near the base of tropical fruit trees as this may cause them to decline.

The easiest way to prevent weeds from becoming established adjacent to the tree is to maintain a grass-free area 2 to 5 ft or more away from the trunk of the tree. Mulching avocado trees in the home landscape helps retain soil moisture, reduces weed problems adjacent to the tree trunk, and improves the soil near the surface. Mulch with a 2 to 6 inch (5-15 cm) layer of bark, wood chips, or similar mulch material. Keep mulch 8 to 12 inches (20-30 cm) from the trunk to prevent rotting of the base of the tree.

Roots of mature avocado trees spread beyond the drip-line of the tree canopy and heavy fertilization of the lawn adjacent to avocado trees is not recommended and may reduce fruiting and or fruit quality. The use of lawn sprinkler systems on a timer may result in over watering and cause avocado trees to decline. This is because too much water, too often is being applied which results in root rot.

PRUNING

During the first 2 years, a formative pruning is desirable to encourage lateral branching and growth. After several years of production it is desirable to cut back the tops of the trees to 10 to 15 feet. It will help prevent the loss of the lower tree canopy due to shading by the upper canopy and will facilitate tree care and fruit harvest.

This pruning should be done after danger of frost has passed in order to not stimulate young growth that could be hurt by the cold.

REMOVAL OF “SUCKERS”

Once in a while young shoots will grow below the graft point of your tree (rootstock part of your tree). You want to remove those “suckers” as soon as possible because if left alone they will grow aggressively and will not produce the fruits you are looking for in your tree.

POLLINATION

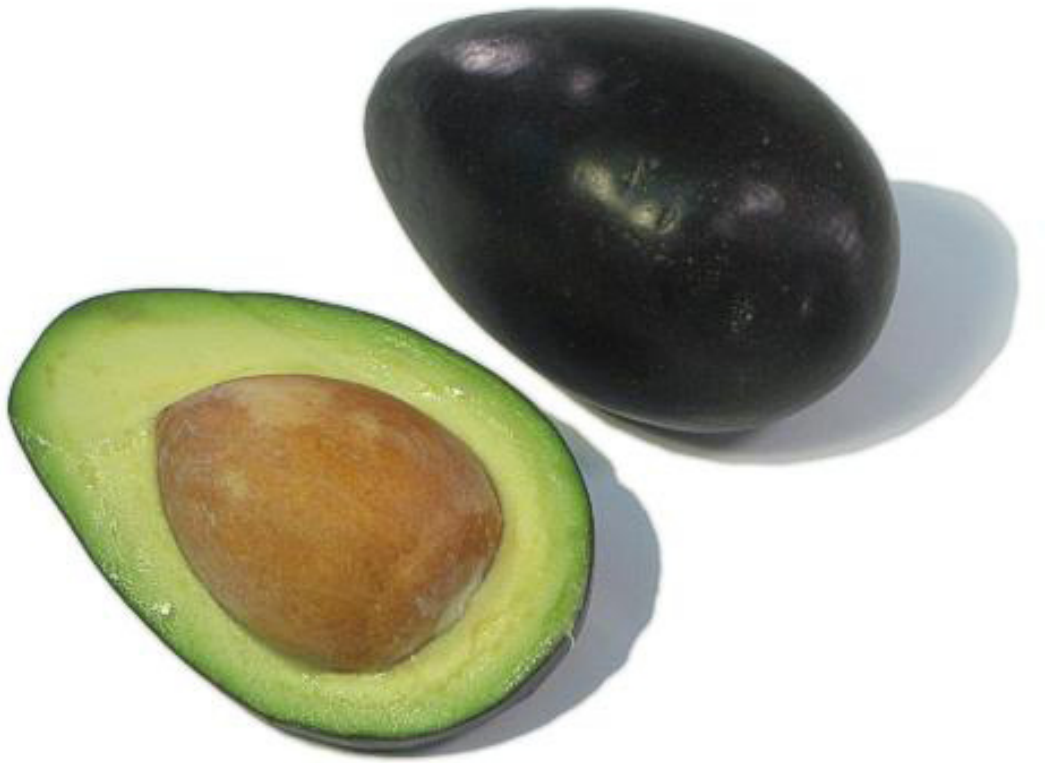
Avocado trees have both male and female flowers on the same tree, making them self-fertile. However, planting more than one avocado tree of the same variety or different varieties will increase fruit production.

HARVEST, RIPENING, AND STORAGE

Avocado fruits do not ripen on the tree. The easiest way to determine if your avocados are ready to harvest is to harvest one large fruit and place it on your kitchen counter top. A mature fruit ripens in 3 to 8 days after it is picked. If the fruit does not ripen properly (e.g., shrivels, becomes rubbery or exhibits stem end rot), select another fruit (again larger fruit are generally more mature than smaller fruit at the beginning of the season) and repeat the test.

The fruit from an avocado tree does not all have to be harvested at the same time. This feature allows you to leave the fruit on the tree and pick fruit only when you want to eat it. Remember, it takes 3 to 8 days from the time you pick a fruit until it ripens and is ready to eat. As the season of harvest for any given variety passes there is an increased chance the fruit will fall from the tree. So although avocado fruit can be held on the tree, eventually they will drop.

Florida avocados ripen best at temperatures of 60° to 75° F (16° to 24° C). At higher temperatures, fruit ripen unevenly and develop off-flavors. The lowest safe storage temperatures before fruit ripen are 55° F (13° C) for West Indian and 40° F (4° C) for most other Florida varieties. Chilling injury is characterized by a browning or darkening of the skin and/or grayish-brown discoloration of the flesh. After fruit ripen they may be stored in the refrigerator.



THANK YOU FOR VIEWING OUR CARE GUIDE. NOW GET PLANTING :)

VISIT US AT THE FARM TO VIEW OUR SELECTION OF AVOCADO, PEACHES, PERSIMMONS, OLIVES, BLUEBERRY, RASPBERRY & MORE!

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