

Four Winds Growers' Guide to Avocado Tree Care



Nearly all varieties of avocado trees can be successfully grown throughout California in areas with mild winters. In parts of California that are susceptible to frost, it is important to select one of the more cold hardy avocado varieties for the best results. All avocado trees need to be protected from heavy frosts and strong winds. They prefer to be planted in sunny locations with well drained soil. Most avocado trees can reach a height of 25+ feet when fully grown. Selecting the proper location to plant your avocado tree is an important first step toward successful growing.

Planting

Avocados require well drained soil and will not thrive in heavy clay soils for long. If you do have heavy clay soils, we recommend planting your avocado tree in a raised bed to lift the upper most portion of the tree's root system out of the heavy clay. The raised bed should be at least two feet above the existing grade of the soil. It is also very important not to plant avocado trees too deeply. We recommend planting them at least 1-2 inches above the existing soil grade and then creating a small mound around the base with a mixture of compost and well drained soil.

Avocado trees should be planted in sunny locations that are protected from wind. Avocado trees are susceptible to root rot so you should not plant a new avocado tree in a space where an old tree had died as the soil may be contaminated.

Watering

Do not over water avocado trees! Over watering is often the number one factor in causing root rot to develop in the first place. Avocados prefer infrequent deep root watering. It is best to allow trees to dry out before you apply water again. In most cases, avocados will not need to be watered during the winter. However it is important to water in the winter if there are prolonged periods without rain. It is a good idea to apply a 3 to 4 inch layer of mulch to avocado trees each year to help retain soil moisture and improve soil quality. Apply mulch in spring and fall spreading it out 2 to 3 feet from the trunk of the tree.

Pruning

Avocados should only be pruned in order to shape and control size. Avocado tree can be susceptible to sunburn so newly pruned trees and young trees should be whitewashed with interior white latex paint, diluted 50-50 with water during periods of high summer heat and intense sunshine.

Fertilizing

Avocado trees should be fed on a regular basis after their first year of growing in the ground or in a container. Fertilize using well balanced citrus/avocado food at least 4 times per year and as often as once a month. Remember that avocado trees that have been well fed year round are better able to deal with cold temperatures in the winter.

Other tips

Avocado varieties are identified as being either Type A or Type B. It is a common misconception that these types refer to male and female plant types that must be planted together for successful pollination. Type A and Type B actually refers to the life cycle of avocado flowers. In fact all avocado flowers are both male and female at various points in their life cycle, making it possible for avocado trees grown in areas with mild climates to self fruit without the help of another tree acting as pollinator.

Type A varieties have flowers that open as females on the first morning that then close that afternoon. The next afternoon the flowers open again but this time they are male. They shed pollen for a few hours and then the flower closes again, this time for good.

Type B varieties open as females in the afternoon of the first day before closing and then reopen the next morning as males.

This flowering pattern is only typical in tropical climates. Here in California where we enjoy more mild temperatures during the avocado flowering season, this pattern is interrupted, causing the male and female cycles to overlap and resulting in self fruiting avocado trees. Commercial avocado orchards still commonly inter-plant Type A and Type B plants to ensure heavy crops. If you want to mix more than one type of avocado tree together in a backyard setting, it is possible to plant more than one tree in the same hole or plant the trees together with as little as 4 feet of space between the trunks. But remember, avocado trees can grow up to 25', so select variety planting site carefully.



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