

Persea americana: Avocado¹

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Introduction

The large, lustrous dark green evergreen leaves and low-branching, open canopy of Avocado makes it a wonderful shade tree but it is most often grown for the abundant production of its well-known, delicious, buttery fruits. Depending on cultivars and variety, the fruits may vary from smooth-skinned to rough, and yellow-green to purple. Commonly seen at 35 to 40 feet in height but capable of growing much larger, Avocado fits well into large residential landscapes in frost-protected locations. It can be pruned



Figure 1. Middle-aged *Persea americana*: Avocado
Credits: Ed Gilman

to an open spreading form or left to grow tall forming a rather narrow oval. Older trees become more rounded. The somewhat showy, greenish flowers appear on terminal panicles in late winter to early spring and are followed by the large, pendulous, pear-shaped fruits, ripening late summer to early spring, depending upon variety.

General Information

Scientific name: *Persea americana*

Pronunciation: PER-see-uh uh-mair-ih-KAY-nuh

Common name(s): Avocado

Family: *Lauraceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 9B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Origin: not native to North America

Invasive potential: little invasive potential

Uses: shade; fruit; specimen

Availability: not native to North America



Figure 2. Range

1. This document is ENH-594, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date November 1993. Revised December 2006. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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Description

Height: 30 to 40 feet
Spread: 25 to 35 feet
Crown uniformity: symmetrical
Crown shape: oval, round
Crown density: moderate
Growth rate: fast
Texture: coarse

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen, broadleaf evergreen
Leaf blade length: 4 to 8 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no color change
Fall characteristic: not showy



Figure 3. Fruit

Flower

Flower color: green
Flower characteristics: not showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: oval
Fruit length: 3 to 6 inches
Fruit covering: fleshy
Fruit color: green, purple
Fruit characteristics: does not attract wildlife; showy; fruit/leaves a litter problem

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: branches droop; not showy; typically one trunk; thorns
Pruning requirement: needed for strong structure
Breakage: susceptible to breakage
Current year twig color: green
Current year twig thickness: medium
Wood specific gravity: unknown

Culture

Light requirement: full sun, partial sun or partial shade
Soil tolerances: clay; sand; loam; alkaline; acidic; well-drained
Drought tolerance: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: moderate

Other

Roots: not a problem
Winter interest: no
Outstanding tree: no
Ozone sensitivity: tolerant
Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible
Pest resistance: resistant to pests/diseases

Use and Management

Avocado trees grow quickly in either full sun or light shade on any well-drained soil. Trees should be watered regularly until established and later during droughts. A forest tree in its native habitat, Avocado respond well to a thick leaf mulch and periodic fertilization. Lawn grasses should be kept away from the trunk. The brittle wood of Avocado trees is subject to storm damage when trees grow taller than 50 feet in the open.

Some of the many cultivars available for variety of fruit production and season are: 'Lula', 'Tonnage', 'Taylor', 'Booth 7', 'Booth 8', 'Pollack', 'Trapp', 'Walden', 'Linda', and 'Itzamna'.

Propagation is by seed or grafting.

Pests

Mites and scale infestations can become quite serious in local areas.

Diseases

Root rots on poorly-drained soils and leaf-spotting diseases can be troublesome.