

Avocado Planting & Care



Avocados are subtropical, cold-sensitive plants that grow well in mild-winter areas of California. Trees can grow 30 feet in as many years, but may be kept smaller with pruning. Trees are hardy to temperatures ranging from 32°F to 18°F, depending on the variety. It's important to choose a cultivar that's hardy in your area; varieties hailing from Mexico (e.g. 'Mexicola,' 'Stewart,' and 'Fuerte') are generally the best choice for USDA Zone 9. Guatemalan varieties (e.g. 'Hass,' 'Pinkerton') are less cold hardy and will require additional protection from freezing temperatures. Some avocados are Mexican-Guatemalan hybrids, including the dwarf variety 'Little Cado' that grows to a more manageable 10-12 feet and is suitable for growing in large containers.

The ideal planting location for avocados is in full sun, in a sheltered spot that offers protection from wind. Plants bloom in late winter to late spring, meaning the flowers are at risk being damaged by freezing temperatures. Cover young trees with **frost cloth** draped over the canopy, allowing the fabric to touch the ground (avoid bunching it around the trunk). A healthy, vigorous tree that's been well-cared for will fare far better on frosty nights than one that hasn't received appropriate care.

Planting time is a great opportunity to make sure your tree gets off to a healthy start! It all begins with soil: avocado trees are susceptible to root rot and require loose, rich, well-draining soil. If you have clay soil, we suggest planting your tree in a raised mound of amended soil at least 12 inches deep and 5 feet wide, incorporating **E.B. Stone Sure Start**, **Bumper Crop Organic Soil Builder**, and **Gypsum Soil Conditioner**. Take care not to disturb the root ball when planting, as the roots can be sensitive. That said, the roots can be aggressive as well, so don't site your tree close to hardscapes or foundations. Also consider that an area with high foot traffic may not be suitable.

Avocado trees have shallow "feeder" roots and perform well when soil is consistently moist, but not consistently wet or soggy. A thick layer of mulch is crucial for maintaining even soil moisture and protecting those precious roots from temperature extremes. We recommend spreading a half-inch of compost over the root zone, followed by at least 3 inches of bark mulch, leaving the soil bare in a 6" radius around the trunk. To test to see if irrigation is necessary for an established tree, dig a hole 9 inches deep and test the soil by squeezing. If it is moist (holds together), do not irrigate; if it crumbles in the hand, it may be watered. Irrigate deeply once every so often to leach salts from the soil that can cause leaf burn. Starting the second year after planting, apply **E.B. Stone Citrus & Avocado Food** in April and July.

Although they are evergreen, avocado trees occasionally drop some of their leaves throughout the year (especially when flowering occurs). With fewer leaves to shade them, exposed branches on young trees will become sunburned and the damage can even kill a young tree. To protect the soft, thin bark, coat the trunk and exposed branches with a 1:1 mixture of **Go Natural Trunk Paint** and water. Allow fallen leaves to remain on the ground around the tree so that they may form a natural mulch layer.

Avocados spend an enormous amount of energy producing fruit. It's tempting to try to harvest fruit the first year after planting, but we encourage you to resist the urge. For the first three years after planting, flowers should be pruned off the plant to allow the plant to put that energy towards growing into a strong, healthy, well-established tree.



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