

Avocado

Botanical Name: *Persea americana* (Lauraceae)

Common Name: Avocado or Alligator Pear

Origin: Areas of Southern Mexico, Central America and the West Indies

Distribution: Important in Central America as a food crop and in most tropical countries Avocados are now grown for home consumption and for local markets.

Australian Distribution: The main growing areas are in Queensland, around the Sunshine Coast, Bundaberg-Childers district, Atherton Tablelands and the Toowoomba range, areas in New South Wales around Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour and down to the Central Coast, areas of Western Australia and South Australia.

Preferred Climate and Soil Types: Avocados require a tropical or sub-tropical climate without the threat of frost and they cannot tolerate strong winds. Avocados can be grown on different soil types, but prefer deep, well drained areas as they cannot tolerate waterlogging, and may need to be planted on mounds to aid drainage.

Description: It is an evergreen tree, with large leaves and small greenish-yellow flowers that can grow up to 10 metres in the Darwin region. The Avocado is a very nutritious fruit. They are not sweet, but have a fatty flavour and a creamy texture. It is one of the most important tropical fruits. They can be egg-shaped or pear shaped.

Varieties: The main commercial varieties grown in Australia are Hass, Wurtz, Reed, Fuerte and Shepard, however those that are suited to the Darwin region are exhibited in the Community Orchard, by way of the T/A Calypso and T/A Schuller varieties.

Culture: It is recommended to source grafted Avocados from a reputable supplier, as those raised from seedlings can have an unpredictable fruit quality with irregular cropping cycles varying tree size. Adequate irrigation is required throughout the year, so as to allow for trees never to dry out. They are shallow rooted, so provide aged mulch to the depth of 100mm around the trees drip line.

In the early years of growth, apply fertilizer regularly every 2 months in small quantities of an organic blend with elevated nitrogen content to promote vegetative growth. As the tree matures, alternate with a complete NPK blend containing higher potassium levels.

Pests and Diseases: Red banded thrips, scale insects, mealy bugs, spotting bug and mites can cause problems along with root rot (*Phytophthora*) if water logged, and stem end rot.

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Fruiting Season: December through to March in the Top End

Harvesting: Mature fruit do not ripen and soften on the tree. Judgement is required as to when hard, green fruit is mature enough and ready for harvest. If an immature avocado is picked, it will not ripen to an acceptable eating quality and will often shrivel and develop fruit rot. Mature avocados can be recognised by the dull appearance of the skin, or shrivelling and yellowing of the fruit stalk.



Contact Us

Phone: 8930 0300

Street Address: Harry Chan Avenue, Darwin NT 0800

Postal Address: GPO Box 84, Darwin NT 0801

E-mail: darwin@darwin.nt.gov.au

