

## Selecting and Planting Avocado Trees

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The first consideration in planting avocados is to be sure the soil is suitable for a permanent avocado planting. Then, select varieties that are known to be productive in the locality in which they are to be grown.

In picking nursery trees, best results may usually be had by selecting the stocky trees with good caliper at the bud union and preferably grown on a medium or light textured virgin soil. Avoid pale or puny looking trees even as a gift, because they will usually require replacement in a year or two with a resultant irregularity in the planting plus loss of time and expense in care.

Tree holes should be ready or in the process of digging when trees are brought to the field. A tree may be severely desiccated and sunburned between the time of delivery and planting if allowed to stand out for a few hours on a hot day. Tree holes about 18" in diameter and deep enough to permit throwing in a couple of shovelfuls of top soil for the ball to rest on is usually sufficient. Handle avocado trees by the ball and, when placing the tree in the hole, face the bud scar to the north, setting the tree slightly high to allow for settling.

When planting, use only well pulverized top soil, free from trash, tamping it well as the hole is being filled. Where water pressure is available, water settling the soil around the ball is very satisfactory, and, on wet or heavy soils, usually preferable.

Where a grower has the proper equipment, newly planted trees can be irrigated with sprinklers. However, most growers plan on using basins for the first season or two. Cone-shaped basins built on top of the general ground level with the bottom of the basin only slightly larger than the trunk of the tree are usually most satisfactory. A basin of this shape will give better assurance that the water will soak into the ball instead of seeping away around the outside of the ball. When dry tamped, water trees soon after planting followed by another irrigation the following day.

Trees are usually delivered cut back, ready to plant. It is a mistake to leave a large top where the ball is relatively small. Excessively tall trees should be cut back to a strong bud or cycle of buds, not to a lateral branch.

Sunburn protection is often necessary. The trunks may be wrapped with newspaper. Some growers prefer burlap or palm fronds fastened on the south and west sides of the trunk for shade. The object is to provide protection against sunburn without discouraging growth on the south side of the tree.

The tree will need frequent light waterings to keep the ball of earth moist. Be sure the basin holds water at each irrigation. If the basins are not carefully checked, water may run out through a crack in the side, leaving the ball as dry as it was before water was

applied. Mulching the basins with an inch or two of organic matter will help hold moisture and promote root growth. Keeping the weeds down in the immediate vicinity of the tree is also beneficial.

Increase the size of the basin as the season progresses. On most soils a teaspoonful of commercial fertilizer applied about every other irrigation during the summer and fall is beneficial. Fertilizer application should not be started until growth starts on the newly planted trees. |

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