

Growing up in Houston, we occasionally heard “*I knew someone, who knew someone, who knew someone that had an avocado tree that actually grew fruit*”. Well, we can destroy that urban legend, and you can be the one the neighbors talk about and try to suck up to. Local growers have worked hard to find and grow hardy avocados for our area. In the last few years, we have been able to get larger quantities of hardy varieties. The best varieties for the Gulf Coast are Mexican (*Persea americana*). The Guatemalan and West Indian varieties are available but would require winter protection in some areas, and we know you probably have better things to do when it gets cold...like making hot chocolate or chili (at least that’s what we do).

Avocados are quick growing, dense evergreen trees that will put out frequent flushes of new growth during warm weather. We strongly recommend that you plant avocados far from driveways and paved walks, as they can lift pavement with age. Young trees should be planted where they can get some shade in the afternoon and where they will get some sun in the winter.

Avocado trees need **WELL DRAINED** (take note of how large that is written) soil. Areas that stay wet or do not drain well are a death sentence for them. Unless you are planting on a hill side (let us know if you find one in Houston), you should **BUILD A BERM** (again, note the large font size), and plant on top of that. Use rose soil or a good landscaping mix...**NEVER** use potting soil, which typically holds too much water. Over watering is the number one problem we see and can cause root rot. Here at the nursery, we only water them every 2 or 3 days, during the heat of the summer, and less often in the cooler weather. If the leaves of your avocado turn brown and crunchy, you are watering too much. Trust us on this, we learned the hard way.... Avocados generally do not need water in the winter, unless there is a prolonged dry spell. We recommend using an organic fertilizer, such as Microlife (made in Texas), to avoid leaf burn from salt build-up in the soil.

RCW only sells grafted varieties that should produce fruit within a few years. Seed-grown trees may not be hardy and can take 8 to 20 years to start producing fruit. If you have that kind of time...we could use help pulling weeds. Avocado leaves are fragrant and have high oil content, thus are slow to compost, so leave them as mulch around their own parent. The trees are very competitive and will choke out their neighbors. They are also so dense that gardening under them would be a constant battle, so just learn to enjoy the look of a well mulched bed...and click your heels 3 times and say “There will be guacamole”.

Early in the year, low night temperatures trigger flowering, before the first flush of growth. No matter how many flowers you get in a cluster, each cluster will only produce 2 or 3 fruits, since they are self-thinning. Harvest fruit before a frost, to prevent damage. Young trees will benefit from winter protection, but mature trees are much hardier. If your flowers are killed by a frost, do not be disheartened, the tree will usually rebloom. Should some defoliation occur, white wash the exposed branches to avoid sun burn and die back. Pruning is generally minimal or not even necessary.





**Brazos Belle** This Mexican variety is hardy to the low teens and has large purple-black fruit with a great flavor. Brazos Belle is genetically identical to Wilma™, but it can be grafted on any rootstock whereas Wilma is said to be only on “Frost Proof” rootstock.

**Don Juan** A variety of Haas! Same size and shape as Haas, found in the mountains of Arizona. Black speckled skin, excellent flavor and hardy to upper teens.

**Fantastic/Pryor** This avocado has a thin green skin. It is supposedly one of the most cold resistant avocados and has a creamy texture. This is said to be the most cold hard of Mexican avocados. (Our grower said these, in his opinion, do not live up to the hype they have received.)



**Joey** A Mexican variety that was found in Uvalde, Texas by Joey Ricers. The medium-sized fruit has thin, black skin. This egg-shaped variety has an excellent flavor and is hardy to the upper 20’s, others say 15-18 degrees, for mature trees.



**Lila.** Said to be genetic clone of Opal and considered to be the second most cold hardy of all avocados. Medium-sized, pear-shaped fruit has a very rich flavor with a green skin...and yes...it is also a Mexican variety.



**Mexicola** Sporting a thin, dark-colored skin, this Mexican variety has a rich buttery taste that has been characterized by some as “outstanding”. It is hardy to the mid 20’s and ripens from August to October. Make sure you provide this one with excellent drainage. Also available in a **Grande** form.

**Opal®** (possibly also known as Mrs. Holland in Florida). Another Mexican variety found in Uvalde, Texas. This variety is hardy to the mid-teens, has green skin and a rich flavor. Bill Scheinder (Devine Avocados) named this after a tree found in the backyard of a lady named Opal Holland from Uvalde, Texas.



**Pancho** A Mexican variety that is very hardy and mid to low teens don’t seem to be a problem. This medium to large, green fruit has a very thin skin.

**Wilma™** Bill Scheinder (Devine Avocados) named this one after Wilma Lechler - Pearsall, Texas, since it came from her backyard. This large, black fruit has a very good flavor. Hardy to the mid-teens and is another Mexican variety.

We hope you saw a general trend going on here...all Mexican varieties are tasty and hardy...but if that was all we wrote next to each named variety, you might think we had not done our homework. You won’t see the Mexican varieties in the grocery stores. They have thin skin and don’t ship well. Avocados contain monounsaturated fats that can break down cholesterol in the blood. These are thought to be one of the secrets to the health of the Mediterranean cultures.

Avocados contain more potassium than 26 other popular fruits and 19 popular vegetables. They are a great source of many minerals and vitamins. The avocado is a fruit (just like tomatoes), not a vegetable, but wisdom will tell you they don’t belong in fruit salad!

