PLANT FACT SHEET

Use with caution

This plant can be harmful if it is eaten raw, in large amounts or without the right preparation. Read the whole fact sheet before use.

Persea americana Mill.

GENUS *Persea* **FAMILY** Lauraceae

COMMON NAMES Avocado, West Indian Avocado

EDIBLE PARTS AND USES

Edible parts: Fruit, Leaves, Vegetable

The pulp of the fruit is eaten raw or cooked. It is eaten in salads, soups, sandwiches, spreads, ice cream, and also in tortillas and in wine.
The fruit are mixed with sugar and water to make a drink.
Oil is extracted from the flesh. It is used in salad dressing.
The leaves can be used for tea sweetened with sugarcane juice. Toasted leaves are used to season stews and bean dishes.
Caution: Some people are allergic.

DESCRIPTION

A small to medium sized tree. It grows 8-10 m high. Trees can grow to 25 m high. The leaf stalk is 1.5-5 cm long. Leaves are entire, oval and 5-40 cm long. Flowers are greenish, small and on the ends of branches. Clusters of flowers may contain 200-300 flowers. Normally only 1-3 fruit develop from each cluster. The fruit is pear shaped or round. It can be 7-20 cm long. The fruit are greenish-yellow with some red coloration. The fruit has greenish yellow flesh and a large round seed. There are 3 named races - West Indian, Guatemalan and Mexican.

HABITAT

A subtropical plant. Trees grow from sea level up to 2250 m altitude in the tropics. It cannot stand water-logging. Branches are easily damaged by wind. It needs to be in a frost free location or where frosts are rare. West Indian varieties thrive in humid, tropical climates and freeze at or near O°C. Mexican types are native to dry subtropical plateaus and thrive in a Mediterranean climate. They are hardy -4 to -7° C. They are salt sensitive, has the smallest fruits and the thinnest skin. The best daytime temperature is 25-33°C. Guatemalan types are native to cool, high-altitude tropics and are hardy -1° to -3° C. It does best with neutral or slightly acid soil. West Indian avocadoes can stand some salinity. They need a well aerated soil. Growth is disrupted when soil temperatures

are below 13°C. It needs high humidity at flowering and fruit set. It can grow in arid places. It grows in Miombo woodland in Africa. In Argentina it grows between 1,500-1,800 m above sea level. It suits hardiness zones 9-11. In Sichuan and Yunnan.

PRODUCTION

Cultivation

Plants are often grown from seed. Seeds remain viable for 2-3 weeks. Fresh seed held at 25°C day to 15°C night will germinate in 3 weeks. It is best to propagate vegetatively. Tip cuttings, layers and grafts can be used. Because different types have pollen at different times of day, for best pollination a mixture of trees which have pollen and flowers receptive at different times gives bet fruit set. Although trees will grow in shade, they need sun for fruiting. The leaves do not rot easily and can accumulate under trees. Other plants cannot be grown under avocado trees.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Seedlings grow quickly and continuously in warm, moist conditions. Seedlings bear after 5-8 years. Grafted trees can fruit in 1-2 years. A good tree produces 400-600 fruit each year. A fruit can weigh 50 g to 1 kg. In the subtropics trees often produce 2 main flushes of fruit per year. From fruit set to maturity can take 6-12 months. Fruit ripen off the tree in 4-14 days. For the Mexican types, the fruit weigh less than 250 g and they ripen 6-8 months after flowering.

NOTES

There are about 200 Persea species. Most are in America.

PICTURES



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)



Credit: Food Plants International (Bruce French)

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