

## **Growing Avocado Trees in the Banana Belt**

I could eat an avocado every day of the year! So, when I learned that there are avocado trees growing in Brookings, Hiouchi, and Fort Dick, I started researching which varieties are best suited to our climate. It turns out, there's more to know about avocado trees than cold hardiness. Of course, we don't want our trees to die when we get an unusual snow storm, but the ultimate goal is to harvest the fruits. And for fruit we need pollinized flowers. So, let's start there.

### **Type A or B**

Avocado trees have a unique flowering system. Each flower contains both male and female parts, *but* they don't open at the same time. In Type A trees, the female portion opens in the morning, remaining open only 2-3 hours, then closes until the next afternoon, when it opens as a male, shedding pollen for a few hours. In Type B trees, the female portion opens in the afternoon, closes for the night, and opens in the morning as a male flower. You will need at least one of each type of tree for good fruit production. Reed and Wurtz Little Cado are varieties that do well without cross-pollination, but are more frost sensitive than others listed in the table below. For other varieties, be sure you plant a Type B within 10-15 feet of your Type A's. (Most people prefer the Type A fruits.)

### **Weather Considerations**

Although we typically think of avocados as needing lots of sun, trees in parts of southern California, are struggling, due to the rise in temperatures. Rather than intense sun and heat, avocados need a certain amount of accumulated heat over a period of time. So even if it doesn't get very hot for an extended period of time, little fluctuation between day and night temps can add up to enough accumulated heat for the fruit development processes to take place.

Cold-hardiness can be as low as 24 degrees in some varieties, such as Bacon, but most do better with temperatures staying above 30 degrees. Using a large umbrella, or building an overhead cover, is the best way to protect from snow and hail. (Wrapping in a blanket does not protect them from breakage.)

Avocado trees do better if protected from the wind, particularly the ones with a more sprawling growth habit, such as Fuerte and Reed. Plant in the best micro-climate in your yard: warm, sunny, and protected.

### **Planting Tips**

Avocados like rich, well-draining soil. To ensure good drainage, plant in a large mound, or on a hillside, with the trunk 8-12" above the native soil level.

Mix equal amounts of native soil, compost, and coconut coir to plant in. Cover with 20 lbs of gypsum per plant. Mulch 6-12" deep. (Recommend large chips that have been aged for a year.)

### **Growth Habit**

Avocados trees can be large spreading trees, narrow and upright, and true dwarf. Consider your space when choosing avocado varieties. See Table 1.

## Year-Round Harvest

In addition to being a nutrient-rich, plant-based staple, avocados can stay on the tree for several months without turning ripe or falling off. Just pick them a few days before you want to eat them. This is the ultimate in sustainable food storage! And if you plant the right combination of varieties, you can have avocados year-round. See Table 2.

**Table 1: Hardier Varieties**

	Flower Time	Harvest	Flower Type	Comments	Height x Width Shape
<b>Carmen Haas</b>	Spring-Summer	Nov - Oct	<b>A</b>		25' x 30' Spreading
<b>Duke</b>		Sept - Nov	<b>A</b>	Rot resistant Cold/Wind resist	20' Lrg Symmetrical
<b>GEM</b>		April - Oct	<b>A</b>	Semi Dwarf	10-12' x 10'
<b>Holiday Dwarf</b>		Sept - Jan	<b>A</b>	Weeping	12' x 10' Weeping
<b>Lamb Haas</b>	Winter-Spring	April - Nov	<b>A</b>		22' x 16'
<b>Reed</b>	Spring-Summer	May - Oct	<b>A</b>	Needs less water	16' x 13' Upright
<b>Bacon</b>	Winter-Spring	Dec- Feb	<b>B</b>		20' Upright
<b>Edranol</b>		Feb - July	<b>B</b>	Hardy Coastal	Tall Slender
<b>Zutano</b>		Oct - Feb	<b>B</b>	Bland-Lower fat Increase <b>A</b> yields	30-40' tall Upright Spreading
<b>Fuerte</b>	May -Nov	Nov – April	<b>B</b>	Wind sensitive	Sprawling
<b>Little Cado</b>		May - Sept	<b>A &amp; B</b>	Dwarf	10-12' x 8-10'

**Table 2: Harvest Times** (Name is placed at the start of harvest season.)

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
										<b>Carmen Haas</b>	
								<b>Duke</b>			
			<b>GEM</b>								
									<b>Holiday Dwarf</b>		
			<b>Lamb Haas</b>								
				<b>Reed</b>							
											<b>Bacon</b>
<b>Edranol</b>											
									<b>Zutano</b>		
									<b>Fuerte</b>		
				<b>Little Cado</b>							

### **Personal Note from the Author**

My experience of growing avocados in Brookings is short-lived. So far, I have planted all of the trees listed in the tables. Most of these trees experienced 2 snow storms during their first winter in the ground! I have planted 15 trees, and lost 2: A Carmen Haas from snow, and an Edranol from a mole.

Here's a link for a local Facebook group, which is where I sourced most of my trees: Bay Area/Del Norte/Curry/Humboldt Avocado Growers <https://www.facebook.com/groups/923870051590337>

UC Riverside has some information on avocado growing: <https://avocado.ucr.edu>

