

Persea americana

Lauraceae

Tropical America

Am: *Avocado*

Eng: *Avocado*

Sd: *Avocato*

Ecology

Well-known fruit tree indigenous to tropical America and occurring from montane forest to coastal lowlands. Widely planted in Ethiopia in Moist Bereha and Moist and Wet Kolla and Weyna Dega agroclimatic zones in Shoa, Harerge, Arsi, Sidamo and Kefa, 1,500—2,400 m.

Uses

Food (fruit), shade, cosmetics, oil (fruit).

Description

A densely leafy evergreen tree to 10 m or more with a straight trunk. **BARK:** Grey-brown. **LEAVES:** Large, oval and alternate, to 20 cm long, shiny dark green above, veins very clear, young leaves pink then bright green. **FLOWERS:** In large terminal heads, pale yellow, only 1 in 5,000 producing fruit. **FRUIT:** Large, round to pear shaped, to 25 cm long, hanging heavily on the tree, the central seed surrounded by a thick layer of yellow-green flesh. The outer skin varies from green to purple.

Propagation

Grafted seedlings (improved varieties), direct sowing at site (sow seed directly at the desired site, 2—3 per station and later select the strongest seedling to be grafted while the others are removed). It may be advisable to try propagation on farm rather than relying on nurseries, since nurseries may be sources of disease unless they are very well managed. Some rootstocks have

been selected which are less susceptible to root rot. Such trees, if available, must be propagated vegetatively in order to get the rootstock with the desired characteristics.



Seed

Eat the pulp of the fruit to obtain the seed.

Treatment: Not necessary. Use fresh seed for best results. Select seed from disease-free fruit picked from the tree, not from the ground. Some viral diseases can be transmitted with the seed.

Storage: Seed does not store well. Use fresh seed.

Management

Grafting is recommended to get the best fruit varieties. Requires no management once established; can be side-pruned to obtain a desired shape. The dense surface root system competes with those of crops, although crops such as beans can be intercropped with young trees. Trees may require extra stimulation to encourage flowering and fruit. Cut roots in a trench or narrowly ring bark to encourage flowering in good conditions.

Remarks

This is a fruit tree which has been cultivated for many millennia. Only one in 5,000 flowers produce fruit. The fruit is very nutritious, rich in oil, mineral salts, protein and vitamins (especially A, B and E). The fruit is common in salads and desserts, but is also often eaten as a snack. It is also used in hair conditioning. There are many cultivated varieties adapted to a wide range of conditions (highland, lowland). Bark, leaves and seeds are toxic to browsing livestock. Bees are important for pollination and fruit set. Oil extracted from the fruit burns brightly with less soot than that of kerosene.

