

Persea americana

Lauraceae

Central America

COMMON NAMES: **English:** Avocado pear; **Kamba:** Ikoloviu; **Kikuyu:** Mukorobea, Maguna ngui (fruit); **Luo:** Avokado.

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.

ECOLOGY: A well-known fruit tree originating from tropical America and occurring from montane forests to coastal lowlands. Widely planted in moist areas in Kenya, up to 2,200 m. Agroclimatic Zones II–V.

USES: Timber, edible fruit, bee forage, shade, oil (cosmetics, soap, lighting).

PROPAGATION: Grafted materials (improved varieties), seedlings (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 that are less susceptible to root rot. Such trees, if available, must be propagated vegetatively 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.

MANAGEMENT: Grafting to get best fruit varieties.

REMARKS: This is a fruit tree that has been in cultivation for many millennia. It is now a common fruit used in salads and desserts and often eaten as a snack. The fruit is also used in hair conditioning. There are many cultivated varieties adapted to a wide range of conditions

(highland, lowland). The fruit is very nutritious, rich in oil, mineral salts, protein and vitamins (especially A, B and E). Bark, leaves and seeds are toxic to browsing livestock.



Unsuitable for intercropping since the tree produces dense shade and competes for nutrients through its dense shallow root system. Shade-tolerant crops like beans can, however, grow under avocado trees.

Bees are important for pollination and fruit set. Oil extracted from the fruit burns brightly with less soot than that of kerosene. The genus has close to 200 members, mainly in tropical America and Asia.

FURTHER READING: <http://www.worldagroforestry.org/Sites/TreeDBS/AFT/AFT.htm>; Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993; Dharani, 2002; Fichtl and Adi, 1994; Jensen, 1999; Katende et al., 1995; Lötschert and Besse, 1983; Mbuya et al., 1994; Noad and Birnie, 1989; Verheij and Coronel, 1991.

