

Persea americana

Lauraceae

America

English: Avocado**Nyanja:** Kotapela**Senga:** Kotapela

Ecology: An attractive fruit tree which has been distributed all over the tropics and subtropics. It grows best in sandy loam with good drainage and has shallow roots, 0–2,200 m. The tree does not tolerate waterlogging but does well in the upper parts of dimba.

Uses: **Food** (fruit), shade, cosmetics, oil (fruit).

Description: A densely leafy evergreen tree to 10 m or more with a straight bole. **BARK:** grey–dark brown, rough and grooved with age. **LEAVES:** large and oval, to 20 cm, midrib and veins clear, shiny dark green above, young leaves pink. **FLOWERS:** small, **abundant, pale yellow in large heads**, only one in 5,000 becoming a fruit. **FRUIT:** on long stalks, large, **pear-shaped to 25 cm** with one large seed, enclosed by soft green–yellow flesh. The outer skin varies from green to purple.

Propagation: Grafted materials (improved varieties), seedlings.

Seed: No. of seeds per kg: ± 15 . Germination takes about 6 weeks.

treatment: Not necessary. Seed sown fresh for best results.

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

Management: Can be side-pruned to obtain the desired shape. Keep the area around the stem weed-free to reduce fire hazard.

Remarks: In Eastern Province, some farmers have raised trees from seed for marketable fruit. The fruit is very nutritious, rich in fat, protein and vitamins. The high demand for fruit in Eastern Province is currently met from outside the Province. Bark, leaves and seeds are toxic to browsing livestock. Difficult to intercrop since the tree produces dense shade and competes for nutrients through its dense superficial root system. Under good conditions trees may need inducement to form flowers. To promote flowers and fruit, cut roots in a trench, narrowly ring bark and even beat with a stick! There are some 300 varieties and grafting is necessary to maintain quality. An infusion of boiled leaves is said to be good for anaemia.

