

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Herman Auer



Given good care and a favorable planting site, avocados can be expected to produce fruits in the growing area. With the occurrence warmer temperatures over the late winter season, avocados are starting to produce an abundance of flowers.

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The 25th Annual Galveston Home & Garden Show was held earlier this month on Galveston Island. The County Extension Office had informational booths and plenty of visitors had plenty of gardening questions. The following is a sampling of the questions we received.

Question: Do I need to plant two different avocados to ensure production of fruits?

Answer: Since this question was asked by several individuals, it requires an explana-

tion. So, it's a not-so-good news and good news scenario.

The not-so-good news explanation is that pollination is a very complicated process in avocados. When a 36-page report on avocado pollination starts out as "There is a daily alternation in the synchronous dichogamy", things are getting deep.

Basically, avocados have flowers that open twice, on two successive days in a specific gender sequence. This is way beyond high

school biology but flowers are a plant's reproductive organs.

The good news explanation is that while avocado pollination complicated, they have been very successful with the process since there have been avocado trees. So, the short answer to the question is "Yes, a single avocado tree in home landscape can be expected to produce fruit."

Varieties of avocados that perform well in this area include Fantastic, Opal and Wilma

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which are broadly classified as Mexican avocados (other types of avocados include Guatemalan and West Indian).

Part of the confusion in the literature on this question comes from an emphasis on commercial production where planting mixed varieties will lead to an increase in fruit production, typically by 5-to-10 percent. However, a single tree can provide more avocados than one family would be able to consume (albeit within a time period of a few weeks around July).

Think of it as producing a bumper crop of yellow squash and the neighbors closing their doors when they see you coming to share your harvest.

Question: How many years can an avocado tree be expected to produce fruit?

Answer: An avocado tree will continue to grow and produce fruit for many, many years. The most popular California avocado is a Guatemalan type known as Hass (frequently mispronounced and misspelled as Haas); this the avocado that is widely available in grocery stores.

The original Hass tree lived for 76 years (it was planted in 1926 and was cut down on September 11, 2002). There are some wild avocado trees in Mexico over 400 years old that are still pro-

ducing.

Avocados are tropical plants. Cold temperatures, unfavorable soil conditions such as excessive soil moisture and disease problems will influence tree longevity as well as productivity.

Question: How many years can a peach tree be expected to produce fruit?

Answer: Most reports in the horticulture literature indicate peach trees typically do not survive more than 10 to 12 years. Missouri horticulturists report that the relatively short longevity of peach trees grown in their state is due to susceptibility to low winter temperatures, diseases and insect pests.

I discussed this question with Herman Auer, a Galveston Master Gardener with many years of experience with growing peach trees. He reported that a well-planted and well-cared for peach tree can be expected to live for 18+ years in our growing area. Consider also that a well-planted and well-cared for peach tree can produce 350 to 400 pounds of peaches annually and it is not hard to see that the small investment in time and effort needed to grow a peach tree or trees can be worthwhile.

Question: I get mixed answers on whether I need two different varieties of peaches to in-

sure proper pollination. Do I need to plant more than one variety for peaches and other tree fruits?

Answer: The answer to this question is a lot simpler than the one for avocados. Peach trees are self-pollinating (also referred to as self-fruitful). Therefore, planting just one variety (or even one tree) is sufficient.

However, it is advisable to have at least two varieties for apples and pears as they have more specific pollination requirements. Apricots and nectarines are also self-fruitful and do not need a pollinator.

Selecting the appropriate varieties for pollination is not always as easy as it might appear. Your pollination requirements may not be completely solved just because you select more than one variety of tree fruit as the blooming period must overlap for the varieties and they should be within 50 feet of each other.

