

COASTAL GARDENER
Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

- Q:** I have a seven-year-old Haas avocado which I bought at a nursery. It has yet to bear a crop of fruit. What is wrong with my tree?
- A:** Under “normal” growing conditions an avocado tree should begin producing a few fruit in the third year of life, and the number of fruit should increase each year after that until fruit production plateaus at tree maturity. There are several reasons why a tree does not bear fruit. (1) Avocados bloom at the terminals of the branches, i.e. first year’s growth. If the tree is pruned and this new growth is cut off, the tree will not bear. (2) If the tree receives too much nitrogen, most of the growth will be vegetative and fruit production will be reduced. (3) Avocados are a tropical fruit. Hence, they do not tolerate extreme heat or cold. A sudden hot spell, especially during bloom or soon after fruit set will cause flower abortion or fruit drop. Avocados do not tolerate long periods of cold. They are injured by freezing temperatures. Also a period of 48 hours below 55°F during bloom will cause a crop failure as the blooms will not set. (4) Persea mite infestations can cause leaf drop, thus reducing tree vigor and reduced or no fruit set.

From your question I suspect you may be in a cold area where spring temperatures frequently are below 55°F (see #3 above). If this is the situation, your tree will rarely produce a crop. And you will have to be content with an avocado shade tree. You can try planting a second tree of another variety such as Duke, Mexicola, Jim, Stewart or SirPrize which is more cold tolerant.

Author’s Note: I recently received a letter from a reader who disagreed with my suggestions for mole control. The reader suggested that a “granular bug killer” should be used to eliminate the food source in the soil in the lawn. The moles would then go away! My response to this suggestion follows.

Thank you for your letter of May 1, 2006. I am always pleased to get feedback from the information I present.

When I wrote the article on moles, I used the latest information published by the University of California (UC). In so doing several alternatives were presented. I

would agree that several applications of a “granular bug killer” would destroy the food source and cause the moles to seek other foraging areas. However, we (UC) no longer recommend this method of mole control for backyard use or any use for that matter. The broadcast application of a “granular bug killer” simply causes the moles to move to the neighbor’s backyard. It is an indirect control of the problem. And it really does not control the mole problem at all. It is, however, a potential cause of major pesticide runoff into the storm drain system, hence a potential cause of water way pollution by pesticides.

Research has shown that urban areas in California and the United States in general are major sources of pesticide pollution of creeks and rivers. We (UC) therefore recommend and prefer that persons with mole problems address the moles specifically and not destroy all the “bugs,” earthworms, and other animal life in the soil of the yard in order to get rid of moles.

It is true that using a specific mole control process makes mole control more complicated, but by addressing the mole problem specifically, we save the other organisms in the soil. And many of these saved organisms are beneficial.

Thank you again for your comments, and please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**