



February 7, 2018

Chocolate Bean Tree

- *Theobroma cacao*
- Also known as: cocoa, English cacao, Spanish cacaoyer, French kakao, German cacao, Portuguese
- Small to medium tree, 25-30ft tall
- Central & northern South American origin
- Used for thousands of years by the indigenous
- Flowers & fruit arise from trunk and mature branches
- Seeds within colorful fruit pods are processed to make chocolate
- Now grown throughout the tropical world

Ideal Growing Conditions

- Hot, humid tropics & evenly distributed rainfall

South Florida Conditions

- Grow in filtered sun (25% shade)
- Protect from wind
- Water regularly during dry season
- Protect from cold, temperatures < 50°F can damage & kill

Best Recommendation

- Plant young trees under

University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
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Master Gardener Hotline
561.233.1750

Growing Cocoa (Chocolate Bean) in the South Florida Landscape

You too can grow your very own cocoa tree right here in your south Florida landscape.

Site Selection. Choose the warmest area of the landscape (usually the south side) where there is good drainage. Plant trees in partial shade.

Spacing. Plants should be 10-20ft away from the base of other trees in the landscape and spaced 10-15ft apart.

Soils. Cocoa plants require well drained soils and do best in slightly acidic to neutral pH soils. Amending the top few inches of our native sands with compost or topsoil will help with establishing a newly planted tree.

Choosing a tree. Start with a small tree in a 1-3 gallon container. Inspect the trunk for insect or physical damage.

The tree should easily be pulled from its container with root ball intact. Be sure roots are not “root bound,” totally wrapped around the root ball. Also, if planting only one cocoa tree, be sure to buy one that is self-pollinating.

Planting. Dig a hole 3 times the size of the tree’s root ball and 3 times as deep. Backfill the hole with some of the excavated soil and insert tree so that the root ball is just above the surrounding soil level. Fill in the remaining space with the rest of the excavated soil tamping down slightly with a shovel to remove air pockets. Water tree roots and surrounding area immediately. No fertilizer is needed at this time.

Irrigation. Water newly planted trees daily for at least 2-3 weeks or until the tree is established. Then irrigate

every other day in hot dry conditions, if soil has good drainage, or less frequently if soil tends to hold water.

Fertilizers. Apply no more than 1/4lb of a complete fertilizer (6-6-6 or 8-3-9) every 2-3 weeks when trees are young and established. Increase rate to 1-2lbs every other month once the tree has been planted a year. An annual summer application of minor nutrients including magnesium and iron will help alleviate common nutritional deficiency symptoms.

Pruning. Allow newly planted trees to grow 1-2ft. If no branching occurs, prune the top back and allow to grow. Do annual selective pruning to maintain the recommended height of 6-8ft.

Harvest. Pods will turn green to yellow or red when

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approaching maturity. DO NOT PULL pods from trunk or branches. Use clippers to remove pods from the tree. A

knife may be used to open the pod and expose the cocoa seeds/beans within.

duces a pound of chocolate.

A pound of cocoa beans pro-

