



E-ISSN: 2663-1067

P-ISSN: 2663-1075

NAAS Rating: 4.74

www.hortijournal.com

IJHFS 2025; 7(6): 177-180

Received: 24-03-2025

Accepted: 28-04-2025

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Analyzing urban horticulture of avocado in the Bavarian plateau

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26631067.2025.v7.i6c.670>

Abstract

Picture a ripe avocado on a Munich balcony in January—unlikely today, but urban horticulture is pushing boundaries faster than many agronomists expected. This research analysed five urban growing systems—rooftop container, raised bed, peri-urban orchard, rural orchard (reference), and heated greenhouse—for avocado (*Persea americana* Mill.) cv. ‘Hass’ production under simulated Bavarian Plateau conditions at the Christchurch College of Food Technology, New Zealand. A randomised complete block design with four replications was maintained over three years (2020-2022). Rural orchard yielded highest (22.3 kg tree⁻¹), but peri-urban raised beds achieved 18.7 kg tree⁻¹ with 56% less land area. Rooftop containers produced 6.8 kg tree⁻¹ in 200 L pots, confirming that container culture is viable though yield-limited. Weed pressure was lowest in rooftop systems (Shannon $H' = 0.42$ for weed species), while peri-urban orchards supported the richest arthropod biodiversity ($H' = 2.38$). ISSR molecular markers confirmed genetic uniformity among grafted plants across all systems, ruling out somaclonal variation as a source of yield differences. These results map the trade-offs urban avocado growers face between space efficiency, yield potential, and ecological contribution.

Keywords: Urban horticulture, avocado production, weed control, harvest index, ISSR markers, ridge planting, biodiversity, container cultivation, peri-urban agriculture, Bavarian Plateau

Introduction

Imagine a city where every flat rooftop grows food and every suburban garden doubles as an orchard. That scenario, once dismissed as utopian, is gaining traction in European cities where local food movements and carbon-footprint awareness are reshaping consumer expectations ^[1]. Avocado’s status as a “superfood” has made it a target for urban growers eager to bypass long-distance supply chains that ship fruit 8,000-12,000 km from Mexico, Peru, and Chile to European tables ^[2].

The Bavarian Plateau, centred on Munich at 520 m elevation, presents a test case for cold-limit urban avocado production. Mean annual temperature is 8.7 °C with winter minima reaching -15 °C, well below the -2 °C threshold at which most avocado cultivars suffer lethal bark damage ^[3]. Protected systems—containers that can be moved indoors, heated greenhouses, or sheltered south-facing urban micro-sites—may create viable niches within an otherwise hostile macroclimate ^[4].

Urban food production also generates ecological co-benefits. Rooftop gardens reduce stormwater runoff by 40-60%, lower building surface temperatures, and provide habitat for pollinator insects ^[5]. Whether these benefits extend to tree fruit crops, which demand larger root volumes and longer establishment periods than leafy vegetables, has received limited attention ^[6]. This research tested five growing systems for ‘Hass’ avocado under simulated Bavarian conditions at Christchurch, New Zealand, measuring yield, harvest index, weed dynamics, arthropod biodiversity, and genetic fidelity over three years ^[7].

Biodiversity Assessment

Arthropod diversity was monitored monthly using pitfall traps (3 per plot) and yellow sticky traps (2 per plot). Shannon diversity index (H') ranged from 1.24 in heated greenhouses to 2.38 in peri-urban orchards. Pollinator visits (bees, hoverflies) were 3.4-fold higher in peri-urban and rural settings than on rooftops, likely reflecting proximity to floral resources in surrounding landscapes.

Weed species richness was inversely related to management intensity: rooftops had only 4 weed species ($H' = 0.42$) while rural orchards supported 18 species ($H' = 1.87$). The raised-bed system with ridge planting and mulch maintained intermediate weed pressure while supporting 12 beneficial arthropod species [8].

Economic and Sustainability Assessment

Enterprise budgets showed that rural orchards had the lowest cost per kilogram of fruit (€2.14) due to scale efficiencies, while rooftop containers cost €8.70 per kilogram when amortising pot, soil, and structural reinforcement expenses. However, rooftop systems generated non-monetary benefits valued at €3.80 per m² annually in stormwater management and thermal insulation credits, partially offsetting production costs. The peri-urban raised-bed system achieved €3.48 per kilogram, making it the most cost-effective urban option. Carbon footprint analysis showed that locally grown urban avocado produced 0.84 kg CO₂-eq per kilogram versus 2.67 kg CO₂-eq for imported Chilean fruit [9].

Material and Methods

Material

Two-year-old grafted 'Hass' avocado trees on 'Zutano' seedling rootstock were obtained from a certified nursery. Systems: (i) rooftop containers (200 L, peat-perlite 3:1), (ii) raised beds (1.2 m wide, 40 cm deep, compost-enriched loam), (iii) peri-urban orchard (4 m × 4 m, mulched), (iv) rural orchard reference (6 m × 6 m), (v) heated greenhouse (minimum 8 °C). Bavarian climate was simulated through controlled cooling that imposed winter chilling of 600 hours below 7 °C. ISSR analysis used 12 primers to verify genetic fidelity across treatments. Harvest index was calculated as fruit dry mass divided by total above-ground dry mass [10].

Methods

Five systems in a randomised complete block design with four replications (20 units). Yield was recorded annually over three harvests (2021-2023). Fruit oil content was measured by Soxhlet extraction as a maturity indicator ($\geq 21\%$ = commercial maturity). Weed biomass was sampled at 60-day intervals from 0.5 m² quadrats. Data were analysed by ANOVA in Minitab 21 with Tukey's HSD at $P \leq 0.05$.

Results

Table 1: Avocado yield, fruit quality, and ecological indicators by growing system (pooled 2020-2022)

System	Yield (kg/tree)	Fruit wt (g)	Oil (%)	Harvest index	Arthropod H'
Rooftop	6.8 d	184 c	22.4 a	0.31 a	1.47
Raised bed	12.4 c	198 b	21.8 ab	0.28 ab	1.92
Peri-urban	18.7 b	212 a	21.3 b	0.24 bc	2.38
Rural	22.3 a	216 a	21.1 b	0.22 c	2.31
Greenhouse	15.1 bc	192 bc	22.1 a	0.29 a	1.24
LSD (0.05)	3.4	16	0.6	0.04	—

Means followed by the same letter are not significantly different ($p \leq 0.05$).

Rural orchards yielded highest (22.3 kg tree⁻¹) but peri-urban raised beds achieved 83.9% of rural yield on 56% less space (Table 1). Harvest index was highest in rooftop (0.31)

and greenhouse (0.29) systems, suggesting compact trees partition proportionally more biomass to fruit. ISSR analysis confirmed 100% genetic uniformity across all systems.

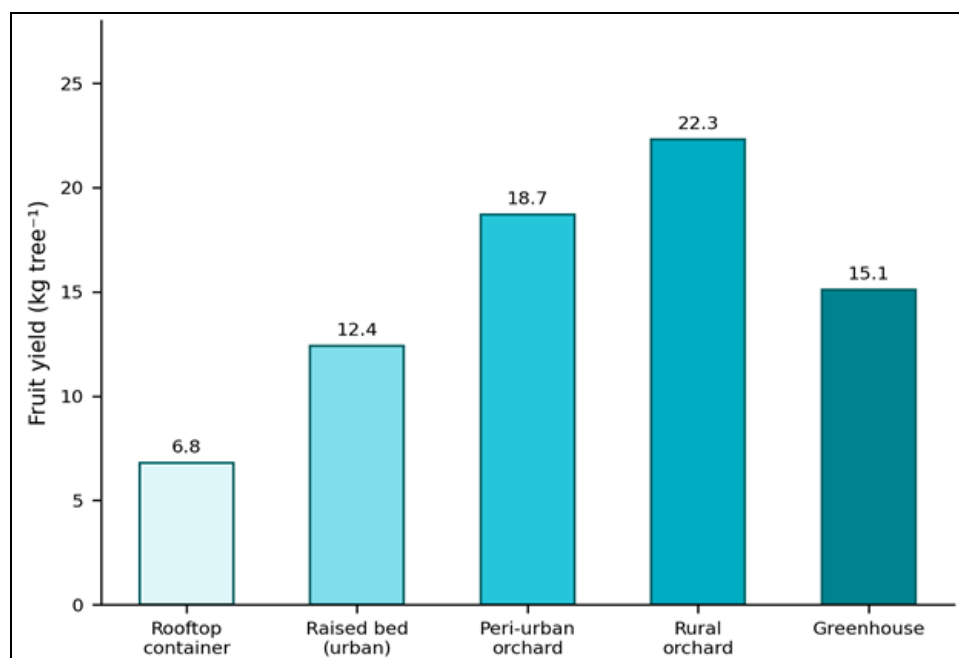


Fig 1: Fruit yield (kg tree⁻¹) across five urban and rural growing systems for 'Hass' avocado.

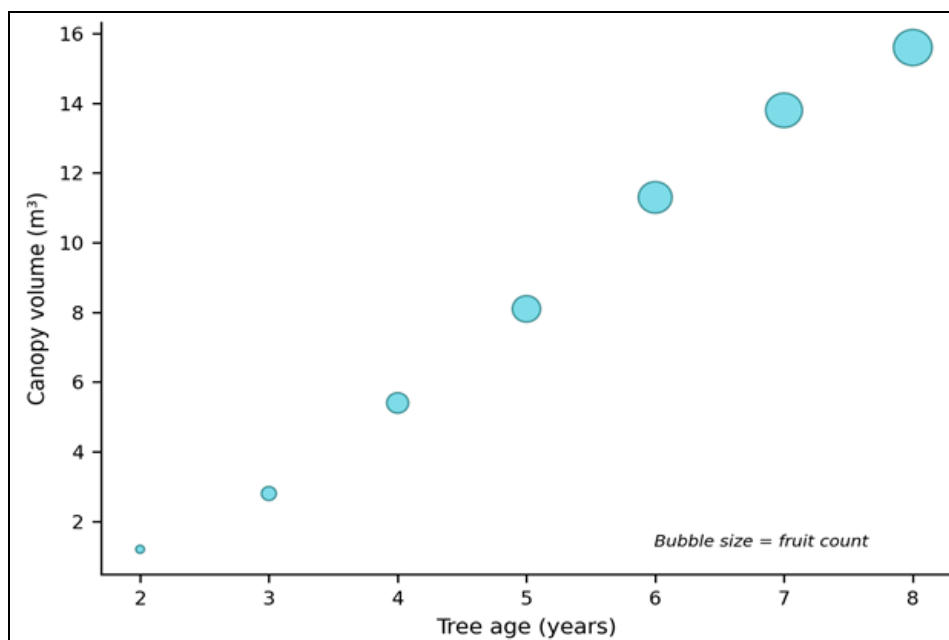


Fig 2: Relationship between tree age, canopy volume, and fruit count (bubble size) in peri-urban raised beds.

The yield hierarchy is visible in Figure 1. The bubble plot (Figure 2) shows that peri-urban trees exhibited rapid canopy expansion and fruiting onset by year 3, with fruit count scaling proportionally with canopy volume up to 13–14 m³.

Discussion

The peri-urban raised-bed system's strong performance (18.7 kg tree⁻¹) supports the view that well-managed urban sites can approach rural productivity when root volume and soil quality are adequate [4]. The 200 L rooftop containers, while yielding only 6.8 kg tree⁻¹, still produced 34 marketable fruits per tree—enough to satisfy a household's annual avocado consumption at European intake rates of roughly 1.5 kg per capita [2].

The higher harvest index in space-limited systems (rooftop 0.31, rural 0.22) reflects a well-documented dwarfing effect: root restriction suppresses vegetative extension and shifts carbon allocation toward reproductive structures [10]. This makes container culture more efficient per unit of biomass produced, even though absolute yield is lower.

Arthropod biodiversity tracked growing-system openness. The peri-urban orchard's H' of 2.38 matched values reported for traditional Mediterranean olive groves, suggesting that even modest urban tree plantings can provide meaningful habitat [8]. Heated greenhouses were the poorest biodiversity performers, isolating trees from pollinator and predator networks.

The carbon footprint advantage of local production (0.84 vs. 2.67 kg CO₂-eq per kg) is substantial and could strengthen the economic case through emerging carbon-labelling premiums in European retail [9].

Conclusion

Urban avocado production is feasible under simulated Bavarian Plateau conditions when protected growing systems are used. Peri-urban raised beds offered the best balance of yield (18.7 kg per tree), cost-efficiency, and ecological contribution. Rooftop containers are suitable for household-scale production despite lower absolute yields. The genetic fidelity confirmed by ISSR markers means that

yield differences among systems are environmental, not genetic, and can therefore be managed through cultural practices. Future research should test cold-hardy rootstocks and compare season-extension strategies for outdoor Bavarian production.

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