

Persea - Growing Guide

Growing Persea

When taking tours around the garden at Caerhays we pause looking at a huge evergreen tree and ask people what it is? No one has the faintest idea so the clue is revealed: 'We have all probably eaten one of these in the last fortnight'. The answer is that it is an avocado pear tree or Persea. *Persea americana* is in fact the Latin name for the avocados which we eat but there are many other tropical species of Persea and just a few from China and Japan which are hardy enough to grow as specimen trees in our UK gardens. Do not expect a crop of avocados anytime soon but you may well be surprised at what these rare evergreens can add to a woodland garden.

As limited supplies allow Burncoose offers two species: *Persea japonica* and *Persea thunbergii*. It is interesting that the definitive publication 'New Trees' published in 2009 refers only to *P. thunbergii* which was then supposedly only growing at Wakehurst Place. New Trees suggests that gardens should try *P. japonica* and, 10 years or so on, we certainly are.

At Caerhays, and now also at Burncoose, *Persea thunbergii* is a quick growing, evergreen and perfectly hardy tree with leathery green leaves. In maturity it has a pyramidal habit and the foliage is clustered densely. Although it has yet to flower the most exciting thing about this relatively new introduction is its new growth. This emerges in late May or June and is, at first, a striking shiny red before turning an equally attractive coppery brown. From a distance the tree looks as though it is in flower but we still have to wait for this. *P. thunbergii* originates from China, Taiwan and South Korea.

P. japonica is quite similar in appearance with longer wavy green leaves although these are not so shiny or densely packed. The bark of the trunk

is lighter in colour and different too. Although this too is a perfectly hardy species which is well worth growing, if only as a rarity, sadly it does not have spectacular red new growth.

Both species will propagate from autumn cuttings which have hardened off. Probably late September to October is the best time to start. We have found more success with softer cuttings so far but there is still plenty of room for more trial and error with these two new species.

Images to add

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