

South Florida Tropicals: Avocado¹

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Background

The avocado (*Persea americana*) has an ancient history as noted by archaeologists. In Florida, Henry Perrine is credited with introducing the avocado in 1833; it's believed

this was the first domestic avocado planting in the United States. Most of the avocados grown in Florida are produced in Miami-Dade County, which has the ideal tropical climate for the fruit.

There are more than 56 different varieties of Florida avocados. Varieties are classified as either summer, fall, or winter. The summer fruit has bright green, smooth, thin skin. The fall or winter varieties are also bright green but have thicker, rough textured skins.

Avocados come in a wide assortment of shapes, ranging from a round cannon ball, to a teardrop to a football shape. Depending on the variety, the interior of the avocado ranges from bright yellow, to yellow-green, to a pale yellow. All avocados have a smooth, creamy texture and a delicate nutty flavor.

Availability

Avocados are generally available from late June to February. Supplies are most plentiful from August through December.

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Selection, Ripening, and Storage

A mature avocado ripens in three to eight days after it is picked. Florida avocados ripen best at temperatures of 60° to 75°F. At higher temperatures, avocados ripen unevenly and develop off-flavors. To ripen, keep avocados at room temperature. To speed ripening, place avocados in a brown paper bag, or use a fruit ripening bowl. Ripe avocados yield to gentle pressure. They can be stored in the bottom of the refrigerator for several days. The peel of most Florida avocado varieties stays green when ripe, but some may be red or purple. Irregular brown marks on the skin do not affect the quality of the fruit.

Uses

Avocado halves are perfect natural containers for appetizers, lunches, or light dinners. Seafood salad, curried chicken, or fresh fruit salad are just a few great fillers. Avocado slices, cubes, or balls are great salad additions. And the most famous use for avocados is guacamole, a mixture of avocado, onion, tomatoes, and other ingredients. Guacamole can be used as a dip for chips or vegetables, a garnish for Mexican dishes, or as a spread for sandwiches and burgers.

Yield

An average size Florida avocado yields approximately 2½ cups diced fruit.

Nutritive Value

Florida avocados are lower in calories and fat than other varieties and are rich in vitamin A and potassium. However, avocados are one of the highest sources of fat in the fruit and vegetable group.

One quarter cup of a Florida avocado (approx. ¼ lb, pureed) contains:

69 calories
6 grams fat
1.3 grams protein
5 grams carbohydrate
200 milligrams potassium
3 grams fiber

Source: USDA NDB Number: 09039

Basic Preparation

- Only use fully ripe avocados.

- Like apples, bananas, and pears, avocados discolor and turn brown when cut and exposed to air. To reduce the browning effect, immediately sprinkle cut surfaces with lime or lemon juice.
- Avocados taste best when served at room temperature.
- Use gentle heat when including avocados in cooked dishes, adding them to hot foods at the last minute. Prolonged or high heat cooking gives avocados a bitter taste.
- **To cut an avocado:** If halves are desired, cut lengthwise around the seed, turning halves in opposite directions to separate. Gently lift the seed out with a finger or spoon. Using a knife, peel off the skin. Slice or dice with flat, cut side down
- **Avocado balls** are especially attractive in salads and on appetizer trays. To form balls use a melon cutter on unpeeled halves.
- **Avocado rings** look impressive and are easy to make: Cut avocado crosswise. Turn halves in opposite directions to separate, lift out seed, then peel and slice crosswise.
- **To Freeze:** Avocado puree freezes quite well, but may be slightly watery when thawed (not suitable for guacamole). To freeze, scoop out the avocado pulp and mash it with 2 tablespoons of lime juice (to preserve the color). Pack into an airtight container, leaving ½ inch headspace, and freeze for up to 6 months. Thaw in the refrigerator before using. Use thawed puree within 3 days. Unfortunately, whole and sliced avocados do not freeze well.

Food Safety

- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after:
 - Handling fresh produce
 - Handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - Using the bathroom
 - Changing diapers
 - Handling pets
- Wash fresh avocados with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
- Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Table 1.

To Sanitize
Mix one teaspoon of unscented chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
Pour the mixture onto the surface and let sit at least one minute.
Rinse well with hot running water.

- Don't cross contaminate. Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of food-borne illness.

Avocado: Tropical Delight

Tropicals vary in natural pectin, acid, and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

Fruit-Stuffed Avocados

- 2 avocados, halved and pitted
- 1 orange, tangerine or pummelo peeled, sectioned
- ½ cup sliced strawberries or other berries
- ½ cup chopped mango, papaya, or pineapple
- 2 carambolas, seeded, sliced

YOGURT-HONEY DRESSING (SERVE ON THE SIDE)

- ½ cup low fat plain yogurt
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 tablespoon skim milk

Blend together ingredients for yogurt-honey dressing and chill. If preparing this in advance, sprinkle avocados with lime juice, fill with cut fruit and chill; or cut the avocados just before serving and fill with prepared fruit. Serves 4.

Krome Guacamole*

- 2 cups avocado, diced
- 3 teaspoons lime juice
- ½ oz. blue cheese
- 3 squirts tabasco sauce, or salsa, to taste
- ½ tspoons salt

Make a paste of blue cheese, seasoning, and a small amount of the avocado. Add the diced avocado to the paste mixture, mashing with a fork. It's best if mashed together with a fork, since a blender or food processor would leave the mixture

watery. Serve as a dip for chips, as a sandwich filling, or as a salad dressing.

*Original recipe from William Krome, Homestead, Florida.

Chilled Avocado Soup

- 2 large green peppers
- 2 green onions
- 2 large ripe avocados
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2½ cups low fat milk
- 4 tablespoons plain low fat yogurt
- dash paprika

Mince peppers and onions and put in blender. Add peeled avocado pulp. Add lime juice and salt and blend. Very slowly add milk and blend. Chill. Serve with a tablespoon of yogurt on top and with a dash of paprika for color. Serves 4.

Avocado Spaghetti Salad

- 1 pkg. (8 oz.) spaghetti
- 2 avocados, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 1 can (6 oz.) tuna, drained
- 2 sliced tomatoes
- 1 green pepper, cut in strips
- 1 small onion, diced
- 4 Tbsp. light mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- salt and pepper to taste

Prepare spaghetti according to package directions. Drain and chill. Mix mayonnaise and Worcestershire sauce with salt and pepper. Combine spaghetti, onion, avocado, and tuna. Lightly mix in mayonnaise. Serve cold on lettuce and garnish with tomato and green pepper. Serves 6.

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