

Avocados

Zerrin Dagli, Amanda Yourd, Patrick Roberts & Lydia English

Plant Parts

Avocados are the fruit of the *Persea americana* tree, a member of the flowering plant family. The avocado itself is actually a berry, and the part we eat is the mesocarp of the ovary wall. Avocado trees can grow up to 70ft in height and take 4-6 years to produce fruit, but once they do, the trees bear 500 avocados yearly on average. The fruit is climacteric, meaning they mature on the tree but ripen after harvest. Avocado trees are dichogamous in their flowering, with the male and female flowering phases separate. The result is that self-pollination is limited. Therefore commercial cultivation of the plant is achieved through grafting (combining the rootstocks of a new plant with the branch of a different, already flowering plant). Avocados can only grow in subtropical climates without frost or high wind.



Native criollo, the undomesticated avocado
(Nick Saum, www.nicksaumphotography.com)

History

The avocado is thought to have originated in the state of Puebla, Mexico, where evidence of avocado use was found in a cave, which dated to around 10,000 BC. Avocados are thought to have made their way to Europe in the early 1500s. The undomesticated variety, criollo, is much smaller and has darker black skin than those we see in supermarkets. While there are several varieties of avocado, the Hass avocado is the most common. It produces fruit year-round and accounts for 80% or all cultivated avocados worldwide. All Hass trees are descended from a single tree, which was patented in 1935 by a mail carrier named Rudolph Hass. The original Hass

tree died of root rot in 2002. Currently, California produces 90% of our avocado crop, while Peru, Chile, and Mexico also contribute.

Nutritional Highlights

- An average avocado contains 300 calories.
- About 75% of these calories come from healthy, monounsaturated fat.
- Avocados actually have 60% more potassium than bananas.
- Avocadoes are good sources of vitamins B, E, and K.
- When compared with other fruits, avocados are high in soluble and insoluble fiber



Fun Facts

- Avocados germinate easily when partially submerged in water, so they are often grown domestically as houseplants.
- Avocados may be toxic to domesticated animals (dogs, cats, cattle, etc.)
- The Aztec word for avocado was *ahuacatl*, which means "testicle tree."
- Approximately 53.5 million pounds of guacamole are eaten every Super Bowl Sunday
- Avocados are sometimes called alligator pears or butter fruits.
- Avocado oil is used for cooking and cosmetics.

Fiesta Guacamole

3 ripe avocados
2 tomatoes
½ Vidalia onion
1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
3 tbsp. lime juice
salt and pepper to taste

1. mash avocados in a bowl
2. add lime juice to prevent oxidation of the fruit
3. add chopped onion and tomato and stir it all up
4. add chopped cilantro, salt, and pepper until it tastes how you want it to