

Florida Food Fare

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Avocado

Description: Native to the tropics and sub-tropics, this rich fruit is known for its lush, buttery texture and mild, faintly nutlike flavor. Known early on as "alligator pear," the many varieties of today's avocado can range from round to pear-shaped. There are more than 56 different varieties of Florida avocados. The skin can be thick to thin, green to purplish black and smooth to corrugated. The flesh is generally a pale yellow-green and softly succulent. Both California and Florida grow avocados. The varieties grown are different for the two states. Florida avocados are smooth skinned and generally larger than California varieties.

Availability: Florida produces avocados from June through March. California avocados are available year round.

Nutritional 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 (unsaturated) in the fruit and vegetable group. One-fourth of a Florida avocado (approx. 1lb) contains: 85 calories, 6.8 gm fat, 1.3 gm saturated fat, 1.2 gm protein, 6.8 gm carbohydrate, 371 mg potassium 1.6 gm fiber, 465 IU vitamin A. An interesting nutritional value comparison of Florida and California avocados showed for 3.5 oz of each: calories - FL avocado 112 calories, CA avocado 177 calories; fat grams FL avocado 8.87 gm, CA avocado 17.3 gm. Other nutrients were of similar value between the two.

Selection and Care: Like many fruits, avocados ripen best off the tree. Ripe avocados yield to gentle, palm pressure but firm, unripe avocados are what are usually found in the market. Select those that are unblemished and heavy for their size. To speed the ripening process, several may be placed in a paper bag

and set aside at room temperature for 2-3 days. Ripe avocados can be stored in the refrigerator for several days. Once avocado flesh is cut and exposed to the air it tends to discolor rapidly. If you are using part of an avocado leaving the seed in the unused portion and covering with plastic wrap, removing as much air as possible, will lessen the darkening. Use within 2-3 days.

Use & Preparation: can be mashed for guacamole dip, peeled and sliced for salads, sandwiches and burgers or halved lengthwise as a boat for shrimp, chicken and other salads. They can also be used in hot or cold soups. For best flavor serve at room temperature except where chilling is specified for dishes such as cold soups or desserts.

Freezing: whole or sliced avocados do not freeze well but avocado puree can be frozen, although it may be slightly watery when thawed. To freeze, scoop out the avocado pulp and mash it with 2 tablespoons lime juice or 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid. Pack in an airtight container, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Use within 6 months. This is good for guacamole or ice cream.

Serving Suggestions:

- Add sliced or mashed avocado to sandwiches (turkey, chicken, tuna)
- Fill an avocado half with poultry, seafood, rice or vegetable salads.
- Sprinkle lemon and salt on an unpeeled half; eat with a spoon.
- Add slices, chunks or cubes at the last minute to salads. For a simple salad, mix slices of avocado, and onion with olive oil and vinegar.
- Substitute avocado for cheese in chef's salads to slash fat in half.
- Spread mashed avocado on bread, English muffins, or bagels.
- For fast guacamole, add lemon juice and taco sauce to mashed avocado.

Recipes:

Creamy Avocado Soup

1 medium-size ripe avocado, peeled, pitted, in chunks	3/4 cup non-fat sour cream
1 tablespoon lemon juice	1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 cup low sodium chicken broth	Salt to taste
	Dash of hot chili sauce (optional)

Combine ingredients in a blender. Chill for 1 to 2 hours. Serve immediately. Garnish with chopped fresh cilantro, parsley, tomato salsa or diced tomatoes. Serves 2.

Guacamole

2 ripe avocados, peeled, seeded
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 ripe, medium Roma tomato,
Seeded, diced
1/4 cup minced sweet onion

1 Serrano chilies, seeded, minced
1/8 cup chopped cilantro leaves
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 clove garlic, minced
Hot pepper sauce, salt and pepper to
taste

Cut avocado in large chunks and mash coarsely in large bowl with a fork. Add remaining ingredients and blend gently – leaving some small chunks is fine. Taste and adjust seasoning with more hot pepper sauce, salt and pepper, if desired.