



PHOTO BY BINDIFRY (VIA FLICKR)

It's a down year for Cali avocados, so make your guac while you can

Avocados are like gold in California. The rich and silky fruit is as good eaten alone with a pinch of sea salt as it is added to a salad or sandwich, and it's packed with healthy fats, fiber and vitamins (especially pantothenic acid, aka B5). California is the largest producer of avocados in the United States, with more than 3,000 cultivators, predominantly along the coastal region from Monterey to San Diego.

by
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Right now is California's avocado season, and the West Coast is starting to see more and more home-grown alligator pears at farmers' markets and local grocery stores. But, according to Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing with the California Avocado Commission, overall projections for the state's avocado production are way down for 2019.

"We're dealing with a smaller crop than we had last year. Basically, we're expecting 175 million pounds of avocados compared to 360 million pounds from the previous year," DeLyser said. "When you think about the reasons behind the lower volume: Avocados are an alternate bearing crop. The trees work hard and take a bit of a break each season. But we also had extreme heat in the 115- to 120-degree range, which is very, very hot in California."

The good news is that, in early April, California growers began harvesting fairly healthy volumes of avocados. DeLyser said about 9 million to 11 million pounds are being harvested every week, and despite the heat wave, she anticipates avocados to be in good supply through July, in large part due to the fact California's crop will be made available primarily to West Coast buyers this season.

So when you see avocados at the store or market, grab as many as you can eat—both ripe and unripe. A ripe avocado will have a slight give when held in the palm of your hand (never press avocados with your fingers as it will bruise the fruit, and no one likes to eat those brown spots). That's when it's prime for guacamole-making. Leave firm avocados on a kitchen counter, and they should ripen in a day or three. And already ripe uncut avocados will keep for two or three days in the refrigerator. Cut ones need some citrus such as lime or lemon juice squeezed on top. The citric acid helps it keep that bright color.

When asked how she prefers to eat avocados, DeLyser said she keeps it simple.

"I really love it two ways," she said. "On a piece of whole wheat toast, or I love avocados with eggs. I just think that's a combination made in heaven. Whether it's poached or scrambled with chunks of avocados, I just love it."

On its website (californiaavocado.com), the California Avocado Commission has a ton of recipes, including a ridiculous number of guacamoles—from classic examples to wild variations, including a Korean rendition with kimchi. The recipe here comes from the hip Petty Cash Taqueria in Los Angeles—called the "best guacamole recipe, period," by LA Magazine.

Petty Cash's famous guacamole

- 2 large Hass avocados, mashed but chunky
- 1 serrano pepper, seeded and diced finely
- 1/2 red onion, diced finely
- 1 tbsp. cilantro, chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- Kosher salt

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