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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "THE AVOCADO WINS AMERICAN FAVOR." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today I sing a song of avocados. What pitched the tune for me was a chat with a friend of mine. I just happened to drop into his office when he had lined up at the back of his desk a row of the fruit sent him by a friend of his in California.

There's nothing like avocados, in his opinion. And he declares that a real avocado fan just cuts one in half lengthwise, takes out the seed, and scoops out the pulp with a spoon, after salting it a bit. His eyes got a dreamy look when he told me about it. And his lips moved a little as if even then he was holding mouthful on his tongue.

And really he made me want to dash down to the market and eat one, right off. Only I'm not so enthusiastic about the salt treatment as this friend of mine is. Avocado on the half shell is hard to beat. But give me a little lemon juice for it - or maybe French dressing.

The Bureau of Home Economics gives several avocado salad suggestions. Its specialists say that the avocado's texture is so smooth and its flavor is so subtle that it goes best with vinegar or lemon juice or with such acid fruits as oranges, grapefruit, or lemons - or with tomatoes.

A salad of alternating pieces of grapefruit, gay red tomato, and avocado, set on a crisp green lettuce leaf, is "lovely to look at, delightful to know." Then sometime when you feel like splurging, you can fill an avocado half shell with broken pieces of orange and grapefruit, or with grapefruit and tomato bits, and pour some French dressing on the dish.

I have friends who are fond of avocado diced and mixed in a fruit cup with fresh pineapple. And it's a pretty dish combined with the ruby hued pomegranate. Just a small pomegranate goes quite a ways.

Another combination you might like is avocado with cabbage or celery, or cucumbers, or maybe in a lime gelatin. These Bureau of Home Economics people say that it is good in sandwiches, just sliced and used with a bit of vinegar or lemon juice. They warn that the avocado gets a bitter flavor when you heat it much. But it can be diced and added to soups, consommés, or omelets **JUST BEFORE SERVING**. That way it just gets warmed through and isn't really cooked.

Maybe you'd like to know what the dieticians say about the avocado. The olive is the only fruit with a higher fat content. Some varieties have as high as 25 or 30 percent fat, others as little as 7. If you've an unusually delicious, rich and nutty tasting avocado you can be sure its fat content is high. How many calories? Well, I'm told that a fourth of a medium sized avocado will usually net you between 50 and 100 calories.

Also the avocado is useful in diabetic diets, as it is practically carbohydrate free. It is less than 1 percent sugar. And it has more phosphorus than do most common fruits and the iron is relatively high.

Some of you may need some tips about avocado shopping. In lots of places even grocers don't know much about avocados. At least grocers outside Florida and California.

Well, here are some tips about avocado buying. Don't worry about the shape or the color of the fruit. Some avocados are round, others ovoid, or pear shaped. And the color range is from purple, maroon, and dark mahogany to near black, and through the various shades of green. Avocados weigh anywhere from 6 ounces to 3 pounds. Most people find a one-pound fruit the most practical size.

How can you tell when an avocado is ready for eating? Here's how. Give it a gentle hand pressure. The amount of pressure needed depends on how thick and how rough the skin of that particular variety is. But if the flesh seems fairly firm, yet yields a little as though it is just beginning to soften, it's probably about ready to eat. I'd choose an avocado with a bright fresh appearance and no dark sunken spots - signs of decay. Steer clear of deeply cracked ones and those with broken skins, as those breaks and cracks let bacteria get in.

Then when you cut open the avocado, notice its flesh. Usually it is yellowish or yellowish green in color. And the cut surface ought to stay bright and attractive for an hour or so. But even the best avocado grown will darken finally, so you won't want to take the skin from any more of the fruit than you are going to use for one meal.

The flesh of the avocado should be soft, buttery, marrowlike - never stringy. Its flavor should be rich and nutty yet delicate. If you get one that is bitter or soapy, or flat and watery - you have a mighty poor one. The seed is always fairly large, but it shouldn't make up more than a fifth or a sixth of the total weight.

Ever hear of the history of the avocado? It's rather interesting. Once upon a time it was just a handsome dooryard tree, beloved of the Mexican Indians. It shaded their adobe huts, provided lots of good food with no effort on their part. Then came the Spaniards. The avocado so tickled their palates that they introduced it into other colonies.

We Americans didn't get seriously interested in the avocado until about 1910. Along about then the United States Department of Agriculture began sending plant explorers into the avocado districts of lands to the south of us to hunt for good types of this fruit. And the cuttings and seeds these and other plant explorers sent back to the United States have developed into the fine orchards of today -- the orchards which provided the more than 20 million pounds of avocados we Americans ate last year.

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