

Avocados

Persea americana



Avocados are native to the West Indies, North America, and Central America. Archaeologists have found avocado seeds in Mexico that are thousands of years old.

Mexico today is the largest grower of avocados for sale throughout the world. The avocado's Mexican name is aguacate.

Avocados first came to the U.S. in 1833. A Mr. Henry Perrine planted them in Florida. The United States is now the second largest avocado grower in the world.

Avocados grow on trees. Other names for the avocado are avocado pear, because of the fruit's shape and alligator pear because of its slightly rough skin. Size varies from 8 ounces to 3 pounds. An avocado has more protein than any other fruit. It contains vitamin A and several B vitamins. It also contains about 25 percent fat. In some places, an avocado's creamy yellowish insides are mashed and spread on bread, like butter or peanut butter. This makes a healthy sandwich. Occasionally it is called midshipman's butter, because it stored better than butter on ships. Try a mashed avocado sandwich sometime or even some guacamole dip.

Guacamole Recipe (COOL GREEN SLIME)

- 4 ripe avocados - peeled, pitted, and mashed
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

1. Pit the avocados.* Place flesh in a medium bowl.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients until it reaches the desired consistency. You can make it as chunky or as smooth as you like.
3. Garnish with cilantro.

Serve immediately. Refrigerate any unused portion.

* To pit the avocados, simply cut in half lengthwise until you reach the pit. Keep the knife still and turn the avocado with your free hand. When you've sliced all around the pit, put the knife down and twist the avocado halves in opposite directions. You will now be able to open the avocado. Take out the pit with a spoon. Then scoop out the avocado flesh with a spoon.

WHAT YOU NEED

- *seeds from 3 large ripe (soft) avocados* If your market has more than one avocado type, such as rough skinned and smooth, or different colors, try seeds from each. You can do this project with only 1 or 2 seeds, but 3 give you a better chance to get a plant. Some avocado types are easier to grow than others.
- *3 clean jars* You will need 1 jar for each seed. Jelly or jam jars are a good size.
- *about 20 toothpicks*
- *water*

in the shade. You can put them in a cabinet. The jars should never get cold. Change water once a week. Keep the water level a little below the middle of the avocado seed.

WHAT TO DO

Wash the pit with warm water. Remove as much brown skin as you can with a kitchen brush. Any skin you leave on may develop a mold. But you can gently take this off later. Poke 3 toothpicks, like a belt, into each avocado seed's middle. You have extra toothpicks, so if one breaks, use another. Some avocado seeds may have already started to split. Handle them carefully so they don't break open completely. If they do, throw away the parts and start again.

Put one seed into each jar. The toothpicks should hold the seed in place so it does not drop into the jar. The pointed end of the avocado seed must be up. The round end must be down. With some seeds, it may be hard to tell which end is round and which end is pointed. If so, look for a part that seems to have a little fold or tuck. That is the "round," or bottom, side.

Fill each jar with lukewarm water that covers the seed a little less than halfway. Place the jars

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

In one to three weeks the seed begins to split in half. At about that time, you will see white roots coming from the avocado bottom. It may take longer than this—even three months. Be patient. Some avocado seeds take longer to get started than other. This is true in nature, too. Soon after the roots come out, a green shoot will start growing from each avocado top.

When roots are 3 inches long, it is time to move the avocado to a container. It can be a 1/2 gallon milk carton, a larger jar, or a flowerpot. Put earth in the container. With a teaspoon, make a hole for the growing seed that is deep enough to hold the roots without bending them. Handle the seed gently, otherwise it may fall apart. Put it carefully in place. Put soil around the seed until it is half covered. Put the container on top of an old dish, so water doesn't leak out onto the furniture.

Give your plant some water, just until the earth feels damp. Place the container in a warm sunny place. Water just to keep soil damp. Too much water hurts the plant.

Soon you will have a nice green plant. As it gets bigger you can put it in larger containers. Avocado plants won't grow fruit indoors. If you grow a few plants, you can try planting one outdoors in a sunny place. But remember to water it so the earth stays damp.