

Go Green: Healthy Avocados Are Abundant

BY SUSAN M. SELASKY

Detroit Free Press (© 2010 MCT)

Pity the poor avocado. It's often misunderstood.

It's not the typical fruit that you eat fresh out of hand. Once an avocado is ripe, it goes bad quickly.

And avocados have a reputation of getting smashed, mixed with other ingredients and presto — you have guacamole.

Not that that is a bad thing. You can serve guacamole as a dip or as a spread for sandwiches or put a dollop of it on grilled chicken or a burger.

But the avocado has many more culinary uses other than making a big bowl of guacamole for last Sunday's Super Bowl — the day when Americans consume 160 million of them, according to the California Avocado Commission.

Fine Cooking's February/March issue uses avocados in soup, salads and even a frozen yogurt.

Currently, Hass avocados from Mexico are in abundance and growers in California are shipping theirs out as well.

This time of year, avocados have a rich buttery taste and chances are you will find them at a decent price.

Like many other fruits, avocados have good-for-you qualities. Nutrition experts have been touting them for years.

Avocados are high in monounsaturated fat — the kind of fat that helps lower LDL (bad) and helps increase HDL (good) cho-



KATHLEEN GALLIGAN/DETROIT FREE PRESS/MCT

You can use avocado to make a dip or as a spread for sandwiches or put a dollop of it on grilled chicken as a salsa as shown.

lesterol. Avocados are one of the five MUFAs (monounsaturated fatty acids) in Prevention Magazine's popular Flat Belly Diet. The diet calls for eating one MUFA at every meal.

Many varieties of avocados are available year-round, with the pebbly-skinned Hass being the most common grocery store variety. Hass avocados are shipped in from California and Mexico. Some stores also carry the smoother-skinned Fuerte variety from Florida. It is larger but has more water content.

The Fuerte is a favorite of Florine Mark, president and CEO of the Weight Watchers Group in Farmington Hills, Mich., because she gets more avocado and less calories and fat.

"I love avocados and honestly eat them every single day," Mark says. "They are very good in the good kinds of fats, but higher in calories so I eat in one-eighth increments."

Mark puts avocados on salads and tops grilled salmon with slices, saying it's "absolutely delicious." And she even uses mashed avocado on her face, saying it's a good moisturizer.

"They are also very pretty to put on my kitchen table mixed with lemons and tomatoes and used as a centerpiece," Mark says.

When using as a centerpiece, buy hard, unripe avocados and place them in a bowl — they'll ripen in about four days.

Mark doesn't make guacamole much because she says you "use too much avocado and then it becomes too fattening for me."

Instead she mixes onions, tomatoes, lime juice, cilantro and cooked white or red beans and then adds chunks of avocado at the last.

"This way I get more of the chunky wonderful flavor of the avocado," Mark says.

It wasn't until Mark started Weight Watchers in Mexico and lived there for a year that she found her love for avocados.

Mark says "it's almost as good as eating ice cream."

"I think once you try it you are going to get hooked on it," she says.

Choose ripe avocados to use right away. The skin will be pebbly and almost purplish-black. Press gently and your finger should leave a slight indentation.

Choose hard, bright-skinned avocados if not using right away. They should ripen in three to four days.

Ignore "ripe for tonight" stickers on avocados. It's not a good indication of ripeness; judge ripeness by touch.

Slice an avocado in half horizontally and twist it to separate. One half will have the pit. Carefully stab the pit with a sharp knife so it sticks and work the pit out.

Sprinkle lime or lemon juice on avocados to help prevent darkening. Cover the flesh firmly with plastic wrap and it will keep at least one day.

Use plastic wrap to cover guacamole and other dishes with mashed avocado, putting the wrap directly on the dip. This will prevent it from darkening.

favorite bread

- 2 tablespoons butter, softened
- 1 cup mixed salad greens
- Red onion slices, optional
- 1 large tomato
- 8 slices cooked bacon (see note)
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, sliced into 8 slices
- 1 large ripe avocado, halved, pitted and sliced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup cilantro leaves, optional

Have ready a panini maker, George Foreman-type grill or a skillet.

For each sandwich, butter one side of each slice of bread. Build your sandwich starting out with one slice of the bread, butter side down. Place a layer of salad greens; red onion slices, if using; tomato slices; 2 slices cooked bacon; 2 slices mozzarella and several slices of avocado. Sprinkle the avocado with salt and pepper to taste and 1 tablespoon cilantro leaves. Top with another slice of bread, butter side up.

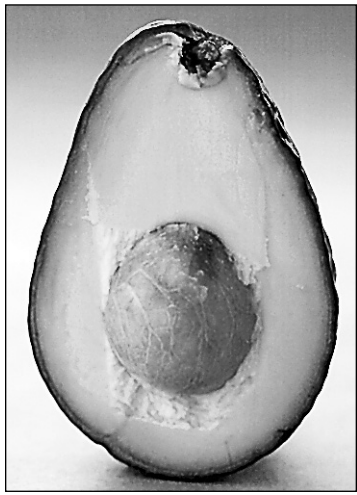
Place in the panini maker or grill and follow manufacturer's instruction for cooking. Or place in the skillet and cook until golden brown on one side, turn over and cook on the other side.

Serve these sandwiches immediately or wrap and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Cook's note: Cook bacon in the oven sprinkled with brown sugar for a real treat. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Line a sided baking sheet with foil and place a rack on top. Place the bacon slices on the rack and sprinkle with a couple tablespoons brown sugar. Bake about 20 minutes or until the bacon is cooked through and crisp. Or you can place the slices directly on the foil. When cooked through, transfer the slices to a paper towel and pat the grease off.

Likewise, to maintain weight,

Avocado Recipes



AVOCADO AND CRISPY PROSCIUTTO SALAD

The fresh flavors of this salad are great on their own. For those who must have dressing, try a drizzle of olive oil. The crispy prosciutto is a nice contrast with the soft buttery texture of avocado.

- 2 thin slices prosciutto
- 4 cups mixed greens
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced onions
- 1/4 cup sliced olives
- 1 avocado, halved, pitted, cut into 16 slices
- 1/2 cup cilantro leaves
- Black pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, optional

Heat a small skillet over medium heat. Cut the prosciutto in 1-inch

pieces. Add to the skillet and fry until crisp. Remove from the skillet and set aside.

Divide the mixed greens among four salad plates. Arrange onions and olives on the greens. Top each salad with avocado slices and sprinkle with cilantro leaves and black pepper. Drizzle with olive oil if desired.

CHICKEN PAILLARDS WITH AVOCADO-POMEGRANATE SALSA

Look for pomegranate molasses at specialty stores. If you can't find it, boil down some pomegranate juice until it's glaze-like or substitute a balsamic glaze.

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (4-6 ounces each)
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses
- 3/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

SALSA

- 1 large lemon
- Seeds from 1/2 medium pomegranate
- 3 small green onions, thinly sliced
- 2 medium firm-ripe avocados, pitted, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped flat leaf parsley
- 1 teaspoon finely minced seeded jalapeno
- 1 teaspoon pomegranate molasses
- 1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt

To make the salsa: Finely grate the zest from the lemon and then squeeze out 1 tablespoon juice. Place the pomegranate seeds, discarding any pith, into a bowl. Add the lemon zest and juice, green onions, avocado, olive oil, parsley, jalapeno, 1 teaspoon pomegranate molasses and teaspoon salt. Fold gently with a rubber spatula. Season to taste with additional salt.

To cook the chicken: Heat 1/2 tablespoon olive oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add 2 chicken breasts and cook until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Flip and cook until lightly browned on the other side and cooked through, about 3 minutes more. Transfer the chicken to a plate and cover to keep it warm. Repeat with the remaining 1/2 tablespoon of oil and 2 chicken breasts. Serve the chicken with the salsa spooned over the top.

Cook's note: To remove the seeds from a pomegranate, cut 1/4-inch off the top. Score the pomegranate on all sides. Place it in a bowl of water and pull apart. Push the seeds out using your fingers. The white pith floats to the top and the seeds sink. Strain out the seeds.

AVOCADO BLT

- 8 slices (1/4 inch or about 1/2 ounce) roasted garlic bread or other

This Hearty Italian Soup Is Really A Meal In Itself

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER

McClatchy Newspapers (© 2010 MCT)

Warm and inviting this chickpea and pasta soup has its origins in an ancient Roman dish, La Minestra di Orazio, or Horace's Chickpea and Pasta Soup. In one of his satires, Horace is quoted as saying, "I'm going home to a bowl of leeks, chickpeas and lasagna...." In fact this is one of the earliest references to pasta of any kind.

This adapted version uses canned chickpeas and acini pepe pasta. Acini pepe, also called pasta, is Italian for peppercorns and they look like tiny beads. Any small pasta such as orzo can be used. Or, just break up any type of pasta you have on hand into small pieces.

Helpful Hints:

- Minced garlic in a jar can be found in the produce section of the supermarket.
- Any type of sliced bread can be used for the Herbed Bread.
- When using dried spices, make sure the bottle is less than 6 months old.
- Sliced celery and leek together in a food processor.
- Quick way to chop parsley is to snip the leaves from the stems with a scissors.

Peeling is easy, though. Just use the edge of a spoon and it usually will rub right off.

Fresh ginger will keep longer if you leave the peel on, and it also can be frozen. Another good trick for keeping fresh ginger is to peel it and slice it, then place it in a jar and cover with sherry or dry vermouth. Cover the jar and refrigerate. It will keep that way for several months, and you end up with ginger-flavored wine that you can use in cooking.

More on toning down spicy soups and chilis: After the question we answered recently on what to do if you make a dish too spicy, several people shared the trick of adding a large chunk of peeled potato, letting it stay in the mixture for 15 minutes and then discarding it. We had seen that suggested for soups that are too salty, but it may also be worth trying for soups that are too spicy.

E-mail food questions to Kathleen Purvis at kpurvis@charlotteobserver.com.



LINDA GASSENHEIMER/MCT

Warm and inviting this chickpea and pasta soup has its origins in an ancient Roman dish, La Minestra di Orazio, or Horace's Chickpea and Pasta Soup.

HORACE'S CHICKPEA SOUP

- 3 teaspoons olive oil, divided use
- 1 cup sliced celery
- 1 medium-size leek, white only, sliced (about 1 cup)
- 3 cups drained canned diced tomatoes
- 1 1/2 cups rinsed and drained canned chick peas
- 1 1/2 cups fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1/4 cup acini pepe or orzo pasta
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Heat 2 teaspoons olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the celery and leek.

Saute 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook 1 minute. Add the chickpeas, chicken broth, water and acini pepe. Bring to a slow boil and cook 10 minutes, uncovered, stirring occasionally. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon olive oil and salt and pepper to taste. Serve in large soup bowls and sprinkle the parsley and Parmesan cheese on top.

HERBED BREAD

- 2 slices whole grain bread
- Olive oil spray
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano

Preheat broiler or toaster oven. Spray bread with olive oil spray. Spread garlic over bread and sprinkle oregano on top. Broil 2 to 3 minutes, or until bread is crisp and golden. Makes 2 servings.

Per serving: 94 calories (30 percent from fat), 3.1 g fat (0.7 g saturated), 2.0 g monounsaturated, no cholesterol, 3.8 g protein, 13.0 g carbohydrates, 2.2 g fiber, 136 mg sodium.

SHOPPING LIST

Here are the ingredients you'll need for tonight's Dinner in Minutes.

To buy: 1 bunch celery, 1 medium-size leek, 1 bunch parsley, 1 large can (at least 27 ounces) diced tomatoes, 1 can chickpeas, 1 can fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth, 1 bottle olive oil spray, 1 box acini pepe or orzo pasta, 1 jar minced garlic, 1 piece Parmesan cheese and 1 bottle dried oregano.

Staples: Olive oil, whole grain bread, salt and black peppercorns.

The Challenge Of Losing Weight

BY SHARON GUTHMILLER

Extension Educator



SHARON GUTHMILLER

Nearly 50 percent of Americans will attempt to lose weight by dieting this year — yet only 5 percent of dieters will successfully keep the pounds they lose off and avoid returned weight gain.

With a variety of methods, diets and weight loss products promoting what looks like a simple solution to weight concerns and a quick, short-term fix, the continual struggle to try to find an effective weight loss method can be extremely frustrating.

Unfortunately, there is no "magic bullet" or quick fix for weight loss.

The only proven way to lose weight and keep it off is by making permanent lifestyle changes: eating healthier, watching portion sizes and being more active.

When selecting a weight loss product or program, gather as much information as possible: Diet books, Internet information, diet listings, and diet products and programs are readily available.

Beware of high costs, pressure to buy special foods or pills, and fraudulent claims when investigating weight loss products or programs.

If you choose to use an over-the-counter weight loss product or participate in weight loss program, the bottom line for losing weight is that you still must eat fewer calories than you burn to lose weight.

Weight loss strategies should encourage setting realistic goals and making permanent changes in lifestyle habits of which physical activity and exercise play an important role.

By setting realistic weight loss goals and choosing to make slow moderate changes, you will be able to fit your new goals into your life establishing lifelong habits.

The most effective way to lose weight and permanently maintain weight loss over time is to moderate your calorie and fat intake.

Likewise, to maintain weight,

the number of calories consumed must equal the number of calories your body burns.

Safe and effective weight loss plans recommend no more than 1 to 2 pounds weight

loss per week. Many recommendations suggest not going below 1200 calories per day, depending upon your body frame.

Portion size matters. We have a tendency to "super size it." Choose portion sizes carefully.

Include a variety of nutritionally balanced foods from all food groups. Choose foods that are nutrient dense-not empty calorie dense.

Check out the MyPyramid.gov web site for individualized information regarding healthy weight loss and for suggested foods and meals.

Minimize hunger and do not have a list of forbidden foods. Denying yourself certain foods can lead to craving and overeating the specific food if it has been restricted.

A few behavior modification techniques that can help alter poor eating habits include:

- Record your eating habits to identify places, emotions, or activities that lead to inappropriate eating;
- Make a rule to not eat when watching TV; and
- If you feel stressed, go for a walk or call a friend instead of eating cookies.

Don't forget, if you take personal responsibility for losing weight but take advantage of support from your family and friends, you can succeed.

Thought: People don't get weak eyes from looking at the bright side of life.

Sharon Guthmiller is a Yankton County Extension educator specializing in family and consumer sciences.

HEARTLAND HUMANE SOCIETY

Kitty Play Room A Mewing Success

As we settle into the new year, just wanted to send you an update on all the good things happening at Heartland Humane Society.

First, don't miss the February Meet 'N Greet from 10-noon this Saturday, Feb. 13.

All the animals will be at the shelter to come and meet — just in time for Valentine's Day. Come in and fall in love with your next 4-legged family member.

While you are at the shelter, be sure to check out the new kitty play room. The walls are up and the windows in place. It still has needs some work to the outside — like mudding it and texturizing it, but the HHS adoptable kitties have already started enjoying it.

The room was made possible by a generous donation from Susan and Doug Tuve of Vermillion. It will provide a place for the cats to get some exercise and socialization as well as a great place for potential adopters to spend time with the animals.

If you or someone you know needs a community service project and would be able to put the finishing touches on the room, please let me know.

We will be finalizing our events calendar for 2010 at a meeting at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 24 in Vermillion at the



TASHA ANDERSON

library. We are changing some events around and creating a new fundraiser this year. If you loved Wine & Whiskers, stay tuned.

With the new office space and kitty facility, we are applying for new grants that are now open to us.

No update would be complete without a note about how you can help. We are currently in need of several things to keep the shelter running smoothly. If you can donate items on our wish list, it would be greatly appreciated.

Needs:

- Scoopable (clumping) cat litter
- Purina Kitten Chow
- Dishsoap
- Laundry soap and softener
- Plain copy paper
- Science Diet C/D Feline dry food (for our special needs kitty, Emma)

• Volunteers for events and fundraising

If you would like to help with events and get involved with our fundraising efforts, please contact the shelter at 605-664-4244. Everyone is invited to participate.

Ask A Cook: How to Make Ginger Tea

BY KATHLEEN PURVIS

McClatchy Newspapers (© 2010 MCT)

I've been reading about ginger tea being good for arthritis and inflammation. I have never used fresh ginger. Do I peel it or use the peel as well?

A. It depends on the use. The peel on ginger is very thin, so if you're not eating the ginger — if you're using it in a marinade or as a tea, for instance — you can skip peeling it.

Peeling is easy, though. Just use the edge of a spoon and it usually will rub right off.

Fresh ginger will keep longer if you leave the peel on, and it also can be frozen. Another good trick for keeping fresh ginger is to peel it and slice it, then place it in a jar and cover with sherry or dry vermouth. Cover the jar and refrigerate. It will keep that way for several months, and you end up with ginger-flavored wine that you can use in cooking.

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KYNT Yankton's Home Team!

AM 1450

MORNING COFFEE

WEEKDAYS 7:40 AM MONDAY-FRIDAY

Monday, February 15
County Commission 7:40;
Gary Pigney 8:20

Tuesday, February 16
Parks and Rec 7:40

Wednesday, February 17
Jeremy Dangel 7:40

Thursday, February 18
CVB 7:40; Yankton Chamber 8:15

Friday, February 19
Observer 7:40; United Way 8:15

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