

How to Buy Avocados

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The culture of the avocado and the success of this venture is of no mean importance, as it is a fruit that can be grown only in a small part of this country and, therefore, bids fair to become one of the major industries of this state. This brings thousands of acres of land under cultivation, builds new homes, creates new towns, and opens up new lines of endeavor for all. It is an industry that, when properly guided, will give the world a new necessity and you a better opportunity to live here.

I have spent much of my time discussing marketing methods for this fruit. I have also tried to eat as much of it myself as possible in order to increase consumption, but when I was assigned the subject of "How to Buy Avocados", I found myself on the other side of the fence. I feel that I would be assuming too much in telling the housewife how to buy a food commodity, as she has a sixth sense in determining values. When she goes to the dry goods store she can judge fabrics on the basis of quality rather than price, and when she buys a dress she can distinguish silk from other materials. When she buys a roast for her Sunday dinner, she knows she will get greater value if she pays a little more. However, it has been my experience that when she is shopping for avocados, she is pretty much in the dark as to the food value of the different varieties and how to distinguish between them. This is due entirely to the fact that avocados are a new fruit, and the public has not had the time or the opportunity to find out how to buy them and get the greatest value for their money.

The subject of "How to Buy Avocados" is a timely one, not only for the industry, but for the public as well. The avocado has probably attracted more attention, been the subject of more discussion, and the victim of more misunderstanding than any other agricultural or horticultural product of the present day, and anything that may be said in its behalf is bound to meet with favorable response. Due to its popularity, it has been possible to sell this fruit at prices a little higher than other food commodities, but it is these favored prices which will lead to its downfall (if not properly controlled) by tempting growers to bring fruit to the market long before it is fit for human consumption. In many cases the grower does not know the variety he has, and, consequently, does not know when to pick. The merchant, on the other hand, is equally ignorant of this fruit and is tempted to buy it on price alone, with the result that he not only sells fruit of no commercial value, but eliminates his chances of building a profitable business. A customer, especially a first-timer, who buys one of these immature avocados will never buy another one. In order to help you know this fruit better, I will try to give you some information that will help you in the selection of your next purchase of avocados.

With the introduction of the fruit on the market as a food commodity, many difficulties developed, such as marketing, establishing grades and setting a standard of quality. It was with the purpose of overcoming these difficulties that the California Avocado Association, in conjunction with the Calavo Growers of California, started out to accomplish this task and make the avocado available to you in its present form.

The first problem confronting the organization was the selection of varieties, eliminating such varieties as were of inferior quality or unprofitable for production, and choosing those which proved to have the greatest food value and could be produced in quantities that would bring the price within the reach of the buying public.

The next step was to establish a standard of quality. Realizing that fruit shipped in from foreign countries was subject to no restriction—that many shipments were immature, lacking the necessary qualities to make them palatable—it was necessary to set a gauge by which to determine its merit. It was found that fruit with the highest oil content was the best flavored and had the greatest food value. It was on this basis that a standard was established. The first great help came in the form of an act of legislation known as the Standardization Act, which set the minimum oil content for marketable fruit at 8%, making it unlawful to sell fruit below this standard.

The next move in this marketing program was to establish a standard of grades by which it would be possible to classify the fruit so that the public could purchase it according to their commercial as well as economic needs, at the same time placing a premium on the very best quality. This was done by segregating the fruit according to variety and size, then classifying it according to the state of maturity and appearance. The last move was to adopt a name that would serve as a guarantee and guide to the public when buying avocados. This name is "Calavo", which is familiar to you all.

That you may better understand just how the fruit is handled and what process is necessary before it arrives at your table, I will try to paint a mental picture of how this marketing organization, the Calavo Growers of California, functions. This organization which is composed of growers, for the purpose of selling their own fruit, owns the only up-to-date packing house in the state. The main packing house is located in Los Angeles, with branches in Lemon Grove and Santa Barbara. These houses are institutions of cleanliness, and are the subject of much favorable comment from all who have had the opportunity to visit them. It is here that the fruit is graded and packed and all business transacted. The first act in the process of packing is to see that only mature fruit is brought to the packing house. This work is in charge of a Production Department. Its duty is to see that growers send in only fruit that is fully matured. This is done by requesting the grower to send a sample of the variety he is to pick. When the fruit is tested as to oil content, if found to be of the required standard, he is allowed to pick.

When the fruit is delivered to the packing house, it is checked in and turned over to the Packing Department, where it is run through a grading machine. Each fruit is automatically cleaned by a series of brushes which remove all foreign matter. Then as the fruit continues along on the belt, each one is automatically weighed and the perfect segregated from the imperfect; then they are stamped with a grade name and dropped into bins, where girls pack them in sales flats. These flats of fruit are then turned over to the Sales Department, which arranges for their final disposition.

It is in the grades that you are no doubt, most interested, as it is by grades that you will have to determine the value of the fruit. As I have told you before, in order to be marketable, fruit must contain at least 8% oil. However, not being satisfied that this represents the fruit at its best, the Calavo Growers have adopted a standard of 15% oil content for their best grades, and stamped them

"Calavo", a name which assures you that they are perfect fruit of the best varieties, thus giving you the greatest value for your money. When this fruit is served on your table, it will bring delight to you and your guests, who will quickly detect the fine, nutty flavor found only in fully matured fruit, a flavor not so marked as to become repulsive with over-indulgence, but one which will tempt the palate of the most discriminating connoisseur. You will want to enjoy them again and again.

Then, there is a grade that, while perfect in appearance, and which may be within the legal requirements, may not come up to the Calavo standard as to oil content. All varieties are more or less subject to this grade at different times of their harvesting period. Under this grade also come varieties which never reach the Calavo standard due to reasons which in no way affect their food value. This grade is marked "Fino", meaning fine.

However, there is still another grade of fruit that may not be of unblemished appearance, yet it may contain the same eating qualities as the higher grades—a fruit which may not appear as pleasing to the eye, but which has that same delicate flavor that will linger long after the looks are forgotten. It is this fruit which, during the process of grading, is set aside on account of scars caused possibly by hail, or from fruit rubbing against the limbs of the tree, or cuts due to the picker cutting a little too close, or where the stem has been pulled out, instead of cut. This grade is marked "Bueno", and is usually sold for less than the other grades.

All of these grades are classified as to size, enabling you to purchase just the fruit suitable for your purse or particular requirements.

One of the greatest difficulties the avocado industry has had to overcome was that of educating the consumer so that he will know just when the fruit of the various types is in a condition to serve, and a few hints may be of help to you. The different varieties of the avocado family are generally classified as "Soft Shell" and "Hard Shell". All fruit, when ready to serve, is of the consistency of medium soft butter or a not over-ripe banana. In the soft shell varieties, such as the Fuerte and Puebla, this condition can easily be determined by a slight pressure of the hand. In the hard shell varieties, such as the Dickinson, Queen, etc., some care must be exercised since the thickness of the skin will sometimes deceive you. If the fruit does not respond to the pressure of the hand, you can determine its condition by removing the little button at the stem end and inserting a toothpick. If this meets with no resistance, the fruit is usually ready to serve.

There are seasons of the year when small sizes of fruit are scarce, and it is at these times that the consumer hesitates to buy a large avocado. However, it is in the large sizes that you get the greatest value for your money, as the waste in the skin and seed is less in proportion. If the fruit is too large for one serving, you can use part of it, leaving the seed in place in the remaining portion; cover the cut with a piece of wax paper and place in your cooler. In this condition the fruit will keep for several days. It is also

advisable, if you anticipate your needs, to buy your avocados before they are soft and lay them away until they are mellow. This condition can be hastened by wrapping them in paper or placing them in some warm place. In this way you can assure yourself of a supply of ripe fruit.

In conclusion, I will say that when you buy avocados, buy by grades, and only such grades as are featured by the Calavo Growers of California. In so doing you will not only guard yourself against many disappointments, but you will support an industry that will bring prosperity to your state and to you.