

Dampier's Early Account of the Avocado

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Among the early recordings regarding the avocado in the New World, the account given by the great British explorer William Dampier provides an interesting evaluation of this fruit, then unknown to Europe. The fruit described probably is of the West Indian type as we now recognize it. A copy of this description in early English print type is seen in the first edition of the account printed in London in 1697. A modern English interpretation of the appropriate paragraph is also provided.

The interpretation is as follows:

"The avocado pear-tree is as big as most pear-trees, and is commonly pretty high; the skin or bark black, and pretty smooth; the leaves large, of an oval shape, and the fruit as big as a large lemon. It is of a green color, till it is ripe, and then it is a little yellowish. They are seldom fit to eat till they have gathered two or three days; then they become soft, and the skin or rind will peel off. The substance in the inside is green, or a little yellowish, and as soft as butter. Within the substance there is a stone as big as a horse-plum. This fruit has no taste of itself, and therefore 'tis usually mixed with sugar and lime juice, and beaten together in a plate; and this is an excellent dish. The ordinary way is to eat it with a little salt and a roasted plantain; and thus a man that is hungry, may make a good meal of it. It is very wholesome eaten any way. It is reported that this fruit provokes to lust, and therefore is said to be much esteemed by the Spaniards; and I do believe they are much esteemed by them, for I have met with plenty of them in many places in the North-Seas, where the Spaniards are settled, as in the Bay of Campeche, on the Coast of Cartagena, and the Coast of Caracas; and there are some in Jamaica, which were planted by the Spaniards when they possessed that Island."

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Avogato Pear. Mammee Sapota-tree. 203

gathered 2 or 3 days, it grows soft and juicy, and then the juice is clear as Spring-water, and very sweet: In the midst of the Fruit are 2 or 3 black stones or seeds, about the bigness of the Pumkin seed. This is an excellent Fruit.

The *Avogato Pear-tree* is as big as most *Pear-trees*, and is commonly pretty high; the skin or bark black and pretty smooth; the leaves large, of an oval shape, and the Fruit as big as a large *Lemon*. It is of a green colour, till it is ripe, and then it is a little yellowish. They are seldom fit to eat till they have been gathered 2 or 3 days; then they become soft, and the skin or rind will peel off. The substance in the inside is green, or a little yellowish, and as soft as *Butter*. Within the substance there is a stone as big as a *Horse-plumb*. This Fruit hath no taste of its self, and therefore 'tis usually mixt with *Sugar* and *Lime-juice*, and beaten together in a *Plate*, and this is an excellent dish. The ordinary way is to eat it with a little *Salt* and a roasted *Plantain*, and thus a man that's hungry, may make a good meal of it. It is very wholesome eaten any way. It is reported that this Fruit provokes to lust, and therefore is said to be much esteemed by the *Spaniards*; and I do believe they are much esteemed by them, for I have met with plenty of them in many places in the *North Seas*, where the *Spaniards* are settled, as in the Bay of *Campechy*, on the Coast of *Cartagena*, and the Coast of *Carraccos*; and there are some in *Jamaica*, which were planted by the *Spaniards*, when they possessed that Island.

The *Mammee-Sappoté Tree* is different from the *Mammee* described at the Isle of *Tabago* in this Chapter. It is not so big or so tall, neither is the Fruit so big or so round. The rind of the Fruit is thin and brittle; the inside is a deep red, and it has a rough flat long stone. This is accounted the principal