

EARLY ACCOUNT OF THE AVOCADOS IN AMERICA

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Toribio de Motolinia, O.F.M., was born in Spain and entered the Franciscan Order there. He was one of the twelve Franciscans sent to New Spain soon after the conquest, these being the first priests sent there when Cortez asked for priests to Christianize the Indians.

These twelve Franciscans, in Mexican history, are often called the "Twelve Apostles of Mexico". Toribio de Motolinia became an important man among the Mexican Franciscans. He is considered as one of the founders of the city of Puebla in the 1530's and appears to have spent much of his career in that part of Mexico. He died in Mexico some time after 1560.

About 1537 Motolinia began his historical and descriptive writings by order of his superior in the Franciscan Order. These writings were finished by 1542, but remained in manuscript until the second half of the nineteenth century, when parts of them appeared in some larger publications. The first adequate printing in Spanish was about 1911 at Barcelona, Spain. In 1951 the Franciscans published at Washington, D.C., the first edition in English that really covered the works of Toribio de Motolinia.

From the Third Treatise, Chap. 9, page 280 of Motolinia's History of the Indians of New Spain:

"Among the fruits on these and all the mountains of New Spain is the one they call *ahuacatl*. It hangs from the tree on which it grows like large figs, although it tastes like pine nuts. There are four or five different kinds of these avocados. The common and general kind which is found in all this land and all the year round in season are those already mentioned which resemble figs. Oil has been made from them, and it is very good both as food and fuel. Other avocados are in size like very large pears, and they are so good that in point of taste and nutrition I consider them the best fruit in all New Spain. There are other larger ones which resemble small pumpkins (*calabasa*). Of these there are two kinds, some have a very large pit but little meat; while others have more meat and are very good. These three large kinds grow in the very warm regions. There are others smaller and slightly larger than the olives of Cordoba. The Indians, when they first saw olives, gave them this name calling them little avocados. The fruit is so wholesome that it is served to the sick. The Indians abstain from eating avocados on days of fast because it is a nourishing fruit. The various kinds of avocados are eaten by dogs and cats, which prefer them even to chicken. I have seen a dog gorged with chicken, devour avocados with relish, as a man satiated with meat eats an olive. The tree is like a large pear tree in size. The leaf is broad and very green. It has a very pleasant odor and water prepared from this leaf is good as a remedy for the legs and even better for the face."