

HARVESTING AVOCADOS

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This article presents the highlights of harvesting avocados grown in California under commercial conditions based upon the experience of Field Representatives of the growers' marketing organization—Calavo Growers of California.

PICKING EQUIPMENT

Special equipment has been developed over the years for picking avocados. The avocado hand clipper permits that fruit to be picked which is within the reach of a person's arm. It is important to clip the stem as close as possible to the fruit. Caution must be used to leave the stem "button" in—to insure uniform softening of the fruit.

An avocado pole picker has been developed to pick fruit which is beyond a person's reach. This pole picker has a bag receptacle and clipper blade at the end of its pole, which is available in various lengths. The clipper is operated by means of a rope which the picker pulls from the bottom of the pole. After the fruit is clipped, it falls into the little bag receptacle.

An avocado picking bag which the picker carries permits the gathering of the picked fruit which is transferred from the bag to the field box from the bottom of the bag.

In addition to the above items of special equipment, ladders made of aluminum or wood are used to pick trees which are too tall to be picked from the ground. Tripod ladders as well as extension ladders for taller trees are commonly used.

HANDLE GENTLY

In picking avocados, it is important to handle the fruit as gently as one would handle eggs. Rough handling in picking results in hidden bruise marks which may not show up immediately but will appear before the final consumer purchases the fruit. This will tend to either lower the grade of the fruit or give poorer customer satisfaction.

OIL TESTS—GUIDE TO SELECTIVE PICKING

During the early weeks of the season when a major variety commences moving to market in increasing quantities each week, selective picking of the larger, more mature avocados is the practice used by most commercial growers. The larger avocados are generally those set by the earlier blooms, and these tend to mature sooner than later sets of fruit. They tend to test higher during the early weeks of a variety's season than

the California avocado maturity standardization requirement of 8% oil content by weight.

Two or three fruits of the Fuerte variety, for example, are submitted to the laboratory for oil tests. These test fruits are usually of three different sizes. The results of testing these avocados will indicate a pattern of maturity by which the grower can be guided to selectively pick mature avocados down to a minimum size which it is known will generally pass the maturity requirement. As the season progresses, avocados of smaller sizes commence testing above the 8% minimum level so that it is then possible for a grower to pick smaller fruit. Many growers continue with selective picks of fruit weighing 8 ounces or more, leaving smaller fruit to grow. They thereby gain in total poundage produced and marketed. A grower may increase his returns per acre by selective picking, as indicated in the table on page 40.

As general maturity becomes prevalent so that avocados of smaller sizes pass the minimum oil content required, clean-up picks become possible.

SELECTIVE PICKING

Estimated returns from 1000 avocados from 10 trees, by certain sizes.*

Item	35	Size 24	16
Fruit weight — ounces	5-6½	8-10	12-14½
1000 fruits would weigh in pounds	371	541	813
Using price per pound of	15c	12c	10c
Return to grower for 1000 fruit	\$56	\$65	\$81
Return to grower on acre basis	\$445	\$519	\$650

**Based on similar data developed by Calavo's Field Representative, Richard S. Birnie, at Fallbrook, California.*

It is of the utmost importance that avocado growers consult very closely with their marketing association's Field Representatives during the early weeks of the season so as to pick only mature fruit. The costly experience of having fruit culled and dumped because of immaturity can thus be avoided.

ITEMS TO REMEMBER

1. Safety first — use care when picking from ladders, avoid serious injuries which result from falls.
2. Frequent transfer of avocados from picking bag to field box reduces bruise resulting from avocados rubbing against one another in the picking bag.
3. Keep picked fruit out of the sun — stack filled field boxes in the shade and place an empty box inverted over the top box on the stack.
4. Rush fruit to packinghouse — an avocado has been likened to a time bomb, once it is picked the trigger is set, as the minutes tick away the fruit gets closer to exploding. Getting your fruit to the packinghouse as soon as possible after picking will result in the fruit being promptly cooled to prolong its life considerably.