

When to pick avocados

Avocados are fine salad fruit from the tropics to Mexico and Central America. Many home gardeners find it difficult to determine when avocados from their backyard trees are ready to pick and use. Different varieties of avocados mature throughout the year, but each variety matures at approximately the same time of each year. The Bacon in December, Hass in April, and the Reed in July. Climatic factors may cause variations of 1 to 3 weeks. The storage life of fruit on the tree will vary from 2 months for Bacon to 8 months for Hass.

Avocados are mature before picking, but not ready to eat. They must be softened off the tree. The softening process takes from a few days to a week, depending upon the degree of maturity, storage temperature and variety.

When the fruit on the tree begins to mature, it usually loses some of its "bloom" and changes color. Small, rusty brown specks may develop on some varieties and other fruit may become somewhat duller in appearance. Internally, the seed coat turns from ivory to dark brown upon maturity.

To determine fruit maturity, pick one of the larger fruits and keep it at room temperature until it softens. It is mature if it softens to good consistency, is not tough and leathery or bitter, does not shrink or shrivel, and is good to eat. The remaining fruit can then be picked from the tree as needed, allowing for softening time.

In some years, a crop of "off bloom" fruit may set prior to the regular crop. These generally will be larger and more advanced in maturity than the regular crop and will be ready to pick and use at an earlier date.

The best place to keep fruit until used is on the tree. Some avocado varieties hold their fruit satisfactorily for several months, others for only a relatively short time. This is a varietal and seasonal characteristic. The best place to store the fruit is on the tree. Picking only a few fruit at a time when needed may extend the harvest period many months.

Fruit refrigerated below ordinary temperatures may not soften properly. After the fruit has softened, it can be held in the refrigerator for a few more days.

Methods to test for readiness

To determine when fruit is soft enough to eat, hold the fruit in the palm of the hand and gently squeeze with all fingers. If the flesh gives with slight pressure, it is ready to use. Do not press fruit with the thumb. This results in discoloration and bruised spots and is the cause of much fruit being destroyed in the markets.

With some of the thicker skinned or hard-shelled types, softness may not be easily determined. Remove the button at the stem and insert a toothpick into the opening. If the meat is soft, the fruit is ready to eat.

Maturity season of common Ventura varieties		
Variety	Season	Color
Anaheim	June - September	Green
Bacon	November - March	Green
Bonita	September - November	Green
Corona	June - August	Green
Daily	September - November	Green

Duke	September - November	Green
Dickinson	May - October	Dark purple
Edranol	April - July	Green
Fuerte	November - June	Green
Hass	April - October	Black
Hellen	June - September	Green
Jim	October - January	Green
Mac Arthur	July - October	Green
Mesa	May - July	Green
Nabal	June - September	Green
Pinkerton	December - April	Green
Reed	July - October	Green
Rincon	April - June	Green
Ryan	May - June	Green
Santana	September - February	Green
Zutano	October - March	Green

The seasons indicated in the table are the approximate months of maturity. Seasonal, climatic effects and the district in which the tree is growing result in variation. Varieties not listed and seedlings vary greatly not only in fruitfulness, quality, and type but time of maturity as well. Maturity dates can be established by the suggested tests.

Fruit in commercial orchards is tested by determining the oil content at previously determined picking dates. Minimum standards for oil content have been set by the industry to assure high quality fruit on the market.