

**PENNY SAVER NEWS HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

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A is for Avocado

School has just begun again for the year, let's start at the beginning of the alphabet and the other A fruit. Instead of apples, consider Avocados, specifically Florida avocados. We're in the peak of the season and prices are really good right now. Florida-grown avocados are different from the Mexican and California-grown fruit. For one thing, they're bigger. Not the little Hass, Florida's varieties can be over a foot long and half a foot across!

For another thing, they're better for you. Why? Well, 'everyone knows' that avocados have a lot of oil. That's true. But the kind of oil they have is the healthy, monounsaturated kind. That won't create more problems for our hearts. Best of all, Florida avocados have less oil (and calories) than other varieties. Ounce for ounce, a Florida fruit averages only 35 calories, while a California fruit averages 50 calories. In fact, Florida growers have branded their fruit differently because of the less fat and fewer calories. There's the SlimCado and the Miss Lo-Cal, both Florida products.

Besides the healthy fat, avocados have a good supply of vitamin C, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and magnesium. And they are low in sodium. A whole Florida fruit has only 15 mg of sodium, so it can fit in almost any diet or menu.

Another difference between Florida avocados and others is that our Florida fruit does not get black. It's skin stays green and smooth, not rough and black, even when it's ripe. You can tell when a fruit is ready to eat when you can feel it give a little when you squeeze it gently.

Unless you are lucky enough to have an avocado tree in your yard, you'll have to plan ahead at the supermarket. Most of the fruit there is still unripe and needs to be

held for several days to finish ripening and softening. All avocados are picked when they are mature, but they won't ripen until they are picked. You can speed the process up by putting them in a paper bag for a few days. Don't tie them up in a plastic bag, they're more likely to get moldy than ripe there.

Now, if you buy a nice big Florida avocado and don't have a neighborhood party planned to eat the whole couple of pounds, you might have some left over. The trick to storing it is to keep air away from it to keep it green. Sprinkle a little lemon juice on the cut side, then lay a piece of plastic wrap over it and press it down gently to stick it against the fruit. Or put the fruit in a plastic zipper-seal bag. Seal it most of the way, then suck or squeeze out as much air as you can. Seal it quickly to keep the air out. In the refrigerator this will keep for several days.

You can mash the fruit with some lemon juice and freeze it for later use. But then you can't use the puree for salads or tacos. There are recipes for avocado cakes and breads that use avocado puree and there's always the Mexican stand-by, guacamole. Make it as hot or mild, smooth or lumpy as you like.

In some parts of South America people simply cut them half and remove the seed. They put a teaspoon of sugar and a good squirt of lemon juice in the hole where the seed was, then use a spoon to mash the flesh with the sugar and lemon juice, right in the skin. When it's well mixed, just eat it like pudding. It's wonderful! Or add thin slices along with tomato and veggies to your favorite sandwich or salad.

Here's recipe that uses avocados as bowls for a mild, slightly sweet ground beef filling. If you want more spice, use canned tomatoes with chilies for heat. It's your meat, fruit and dish all in one. See if the children don't enjoy eating their bowls!

#### Hot Stuffed Florida Avocados

1 pound lean ground beef	1 medium onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced	1 cup canned tomatoes
1 cup beef broth	1/4 cup raisins

1/8 tsp each cloves, cumin, black pepper      3 medium Florida avocados

In large skillet saute meat, onion and garlic. Use as little oil as possible, and drain off any grease after the meat is browned. Add tomatoes, broth, raisins and seasonings and simmer uncovered for 20 minutes. If it is very watery, add a little cornstarch mixed with water and simmer another 4-5 minutes to thicken it. Cut avocados in half and remove seeds. Fill the seed spaces with the beef filling. Serve at once with tortilla chips or crackers. (Recipe from Fl. Avocado Commission) There are more recipes at [www.brookstropicals.com](http://www.brookstropicals.com).