

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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Avocado or alligator pear, sliced, stuffed or guacamole, most of us recognize the oval black or green fruit with the soft green flesh and great big seed inside. But sometimes we cut into one and find it grey, brown, black or streaky instead of green. What happened? What can we do about it, or with it, at that point?

As many know, avocados don't really start to ripen, that is to get soft, until after they have been harvested. While still on the tree they get larger and increase the amount of oil until they are mature. Then they can hang on the tree for up to 6 months, but they won't soften. Growers use a combination of size, weight, how much oil it has and how many days it's been since the tree flowered to decide whether the fruit is mature enough to pick. Florida avocados are larger, but have less oil than others.

If fruit is picked before it is fully mature it can get soft. But immature soft fruit, like a teenager who looks much older than he really is, won't act like a mature fruit. It will take immature fruit longer to get soft. Soft immature fruit won't taste ripe either. It might get a grassy or bitter flavor. Instead of being creamy smooth the flesh can feel rubbery. These fruits will often rot sooner, might shrivel or get dry. So if you get an avocado that looks or feels like this, it was picked too young. Waiting won't improve it.

When avocados are picked fully mature, they need to be held at the right temperature to ripen well. They're usually cooled as soon as they're picked, so that they don't start ripening just yet. Once they get warm enough that the ripening starts, it can't be stopped. The store needs to sell them soon enough that they're nice and soft

but not rotting by the time we get to use them. That can be tricky timing.

For most varieties a temperature of between 60° and 70° F is about right, though some do better slightly warmer or cooler. If they're too hot, the fruit tends to ripen unevenly, both inside and outside, or it won't ripen at all. The skin can look blotchy instead of evenly green or black. Strange flavors can develop too, probably coming from some of the oil. And of course they're more likely to rot or to shrivel.

For us as consumers, uneven colors on the skin or soft spots under the skin can be signs that this fruit has been too hot. If we buy it because the price is right we ought to use it right away, and expect that we might need to trim out some soft spots.

Just as hot storage won't give us a good quality avocado, neither will too cold a storage temperature be good for them. Most avocados don't like temperatures below 55° F, although a few can handle as low as 43°. When avocados are too cold for too long they're likely to turn grayish-brown inside, and the veins will look like dark strings running through the fruit. The flavor suffers too. These changes are called chilling injury. It usually happens after the fruit has been harvested although our cold temperatures recently could cause them to occur in mature fruit still on the tree.

Don't store your avocados in the refrigerator. As with fruit that got too hot, there's nothing you can do to change them back. If the flavor's not too bad, use them. They won't make you sick. However there are several fungus diseases that can attack avocados too. These are likely to turn the fruit dark, black or brown. It might start at the end where the stem was, or where there was an injury to the skin. These need to be trimmed out and the rest of the fruit eaten promptly, otherwise the whole fruit will turn black and decay quickly.

If you're not a fan of guacamole but want something other than sliced avocados on a sandwich, here's a chopped salad you might enjoy. For a little extra spice add several drops of hot sauce to the mayonnaise.

#### Florida Salad

2 medium tomatoes, diced	1 medium Florida avocados
1 Tbsp minced onion	1 Tbsp lime juice
¼ cup peeled and diced cucumber	¼ cup low fat mayonnaise
2 Tbsp diced celery	lettuce or salad greens

Combine tomatoes, onion, celery and cucumber. Peel and cube avocados and sprinkle immediately with lime juice. Add to vegetables. Add mayonnaise (with hot sauce if desired) and toss gently to coat. Serve on lettuce or salad greens. Serves 4.

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