

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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If you're an avocado aficionado now's the time to enjoy them. We're coming into season and prices are going down. Don't worry if you heard some recent news reports about the beetles getting into avocado trees. They do not get into the avocado fruits and won't make them unsafe to eat. Unfortunately, if they do get into our avocado groves we won't have as many fruit to eat. The beetles kill the trees, which means no fruit, but the fruit we have will still be safe.

If you're looking for ancient, native fruit, avocado has to be on your list. There are wall paintings of them in Mayan and Peruvian ruins from before the time of Christ. The Aztecs in Mexico considered them aphrodisiacs and young women were not allowed to have or even see them. What a pity for the women who had to miss out on such delicious fruit!

The outer skin is rough and pebbly, which is why they're called alligator pears. They could be green or almost black. But, you can guess what they are like inside from some of their other names - custard apple and butter pear. When an avocado is ripe it is soft and smooth as warm butter inside. Many people just spread ripe avocado on their bread or toast. If your avocado is too hard to spread it's not quite fully ripe yet.

Thank goodness they're not as large as alligators, but they do come in a variety of sizes. Some Florida avocados are almost as large as footballs. California fruit are about the size of medium apples, and some Mexican varieties are the size of small plums. Some are definitely pear-shaped, other are almost round. There are over 60

varieties in Florida alone. With that range you can surely find one that will fit the eating habits of your household, without worrying about having a lot go to waste.

Don't look for "tree ripened" on avocado labels the way tomatoes are labeled "vine ripened." One unusual thing about avocados is that they never ripen on the tree. They're picked, by hand only, when they're mature enough to have a good flavor and color. But they won't start softening until they've been picked and held at room temperature a few days.

In the store you want to look for fruit that is uniformly colored, with no soft or dull spots on the skin. If you give it a gentle squeeze and it gives easily it's been picked long enough that it's ready to eat. Plan to use that one tonight for dinner, or refrigerate it for a few days. But if you want one for later in the week, get one that is still firm. Just leave it on the table for a day or two at room temperature. It will be ready shortly. If you must speed up the process put it in a paper bag and close the top. The bag will hold in the natural gas the fruit makes to ripen itself more quickly.

Opening an avocado is easy. Use a sharp knife to cut it in half around the large seed. Hold the two halves and twist in opposite directions. You'll have a split avocado, with a seed in one half. Use a knife, spoon or fingers to pull the seed out. Either scoop the pale yellow 'butter' out with a spoon or use a knife to slice the skin then peel it off. It will come off as easily as you peel a banana.

Avocados turn dark very quickly after they're cut. A sprinkle of lemon juice will help keep them light. Or use plastic wrap, pressing it snugly against the cut sides. To freeze extra avocado, mash the fruit with some added lemon juice. Pack in bags and squeeze out as much air as possible. Or put in a freezer container and press a sheet of

plastic wrap over the surface. Unfortunately sliced or diced avocado doesn't do well in the freezer or on the stove. Cooking avocados will make them turn bitter, so be gentle with any heating.

Here's a flavorful and colorful pasta salad. Use spaghetti or any other pasta shape you want. Serve it over lettuce or a bagged salad mixture.

Avocado Pasta Salad

8 oz spaghetti or other pasta	2 avocados, peeled and diced
2 6-oz cans chunk tuna, drained	1 small onion, diced
4 Tbsp light mayonnaise	1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1 bag ready-to-eat salad greens	salt, pepper, hot sauce to taste
2 tomatoes, diced	1 green pepper, cut in strips

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and chill. Mix mayonnaise, onion, Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper and hot sauce as desired. Put chilled pasta, diced avocados and tuna in large bowl. Gently stir in mayonnaise mixture. Chill. To serve, distribute greens to 6 plates. Divide pasta mixture over greens, then sprinkle with tomato and green pepper pieces. Serves 6.