

Exclusive to the St. Helena Farmers' Market

Recipes, Tips, and Usage Ideas:

Prawn and Avocado Salsa with Chips

Guacamole

Avocado Tips

What the Heck to Do with a Hass

It Has to Be a Hass

By Suzanne Carreiro

It's hard to imagine that an avocado with a green bumpy complexion could be good for your face. But if you ask Tricia Williamson-Parkan, avocado vendor at the St. Helena Farmers Market, she'll tell you, "Avocados are very hydrating for the skin." Tricia's recipe for an inexpensive beauty mask or hair conditioner couldn't be simpler. "Just mash a ripe avocado and apply it to your clean face or clean, damp hair. Leave it on 20 minutes and rinse it out." She says this gives your hair shine and sheen and moisturizes your face.

Tricia and her father-in-law, Charlie Parkan, of Williamson Farms—the newest vendors at the market—sell Hass avocados grown in Riverside County. The Hass avocado, a variety inadvertently discovered by Rudolph Hass in the 1920s, is now California's favorite avocado. Its flesh is denser and has a richer, silkier mouth feel than its smooth-skinned competitors. It is by far the best avocado for guacamole. Right now, with Hass avocados at peak season, Williamson Farms is selling avocados at prices so reasonable you'll be tempted to buy them by the bagful.

"Will you be using the avocados right away?" Tricia asked as I began selecting avocados to buy. "If you are, then take some from here, they're ripe and ready-to-eat." She explained the avocado display—the ripest avocados, those starting to turn black, were on the left end of the table and the green, lesser ripe avocados were at the right end. That made shopping easy. I grabbed several ripe ones and then worked my way across the table selecting avocados in varying stages of ripeness to use over the next several days. Here are a couple recipes I developed for Hass avocados. Enjoy!

Prawn and Avocado Salsa with Chips

This ceviche-style salsa is so marvelous; you'll probably want to make a double batch.

1 pound prawns, shelled and deveined

4 teaspoons olive oil

2 large garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon grated fresh lime zest (colored outer peel)
1/3 cup fresh lime juice
3/8 teaspoon salt
1 medium tomato, seeded and diced 1/4-inch
1/3 cup loosely packed fresh cilantro, finely chopped
1 Hass avocado, peeled, pitted, and diced 1/4-inch (see Avocado Tips)
1 bag (14 ounces) salted tortilla chips

Remove and discard the prawn tails; chop the prawns into 3/8-inch pieces. In a heavy skillet, heat 2 teaspoons of the oil over medium heat. Add the garlic; cook until light golden, about 1/2 minute. Add the prawns; cook until just pink, about 1 minute. Immediately transfer to a bowl. Add the lime zest, juice, and salt to the prawns; toss. Chill about 20 minutes. Stir in the tomato, cilantro, and remaining 2 teaspoons of oil. Chill at least 1 hour and up to 8 hours. Up to an hour before serving, gently stir in the avocado; adjust the salt to taste. Keep refrigerated until serving time. Serve with tortilla chips and crisp Sauvignon Blanc.

Makes about 2 cups salsa

Guacamole

When I worked in a Mexican restaurant, we tossed the avocado pits on top of the guacamole to keep it from turning brown. The best avocados for guacamole are just ripe, not overly ripe.

2 ripe Hass avocados, peeled and pitted (see Avocado Tips)
1 medium garlic clove, very finely minced
1/2 to 1 jalapeño pepper minced
Juice of 1 medium lime
1/8 teaspoon salt

Place the avocados in a medium bowl; add garlic, jalapeño, lime juice, and salt. Use a fork to mash and mix the ingredients until the avocados form a creamy base but there are still lumps. Do not puree—guacamole loses its character without some chunks of avocado. Adjust the salt (it is very important to have enough salt). Add more jalapeño if more heat is desired. Serve with tortilla chips or serve as a condiment for tacos, quesadillas, sandwiches, burgers, tostadas, and salads. Makes 2 to 4 servings.

Note: wear latex gloves when handling jalapeño peppers because they can burn skin. After handling the peppers, wash hands thoroughly.

Food Processor Guacamole: This is a quick way to make large batches of guacamole. First, process the garlic, jalapeño, and salt, pulsing it until finely chopped. Then add the avocados; pulsing until the mixture is creamy but lumpy. Be careful not to over process—you do not want a puree.

Avocado Tips

- To prepare an unpeeled avocado, cut it lengthwise around the seed. Twist the halves to separate them. Use the tip of a spoon to lift out the seed.
- For recipes using mashed avocado, use a spoon to scoop the avocado out of its skin. For other preparations, remove the skin by lifting it off with a paring knife.
- Hass avocados turn almost black when ripe. When held in the palm of your hand and gently squeezed, ripe avocados give slightly.
- To speed up ripening, seal avocados in a paper bag with an apple or banana. The fruit gives off ethylene gas, which hastens ripening. Avocados take about 2 to 5 days to ripen.
- Rub cut surfaces of avocados with lime or lemon juice or vinegar to prevent browning.
- To freeze avocados, puree them and stir in about 2 teaspoons lemon or lime juice per avocado. Place in a freezer container; freeze up to 3 months.
- For more information about avocados visit www.avocado.org. The site is in English and Spanish.

What the Heck to Do with a Hass

- Add sliced or diced avocado to any seafood salad and toss it with a citrus vinaigrette.
- Make a vegetarian tostada—crisp fried tortilla, a thin layer of beans, a bit of grated cheese, a mound of lettuce (dressed with a splash of vinegar, minced garlic, olive oil, and salt and pepper) and lots of guacamole and fresh heirloom tomato salsa.
- Top any sandwich, burger, or quesadilla with guacamole or thin slices of avocado.
- Make a salad of avocado slices and thinly sliced radishes. Season it with fresh lime juice, olive oil, and salt and pepper.
- Create a green salad with butter lettuce, fresh orange and avocado slices, and thinly sliced fresh fennel and red onion. Make a dressing with a little lemon juice, orange juice, olive oil, salt and pepper.

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