

# "A" is for Avocado

by Lydia Lovell

The avocado, a highly-valued fruit, grows in tropical and semi-tropical climates both commercially and in dooryards. The trees that bear the fruit are divided by horticulturists into three different "races"...Mexican, Guatemalan, and West Indian...and among these races are at least a dozen varieties that produce fruit in Florida and California.

Botanically, the avocado is named *Persea americana*, is a member of the Laurel family and cousin to cinnamon, camphor, sassafras, and sweet bay trees. In this country, when Aunt Olivia first encountered the delicious buttery fruit, it was commonly called Alligator Pear. The name avocado is derived from the Aztec word "ahuacatl"; in Spanish, the name is "aguacate"; Portuguese-speaking Brazilians refer to it as "abacate." By whatever name, avocados are delectable.

Aunt Olivia was particularly fond of them, and it was she who introduced them to me. From the moment the first mouthful melted on my tongue, the avocado gained a new devotee. Before giving recipes, however, let me supply a few suggestions from Aunt Olivia's notes.

Purchase avocados while they are still very firm; ripen them at home at room temperature. They will reach perfection fastest if wrapped in foil or placed in a brown paper bag folded shut. To test for ripeness, press the fruit (oh, ever-so-gently because it bruises easily) in your hand. When it feels slightly soft, it is ready. A ripe avocado may be kept for 24 to 48 hours in the refrigerator, but should be used as soon as possible for peak flavor. Once cut, avocados ripen no further. To prevent darkening of the flesh after cutting, brush the cut surfaces of the avocado with lemon juice.

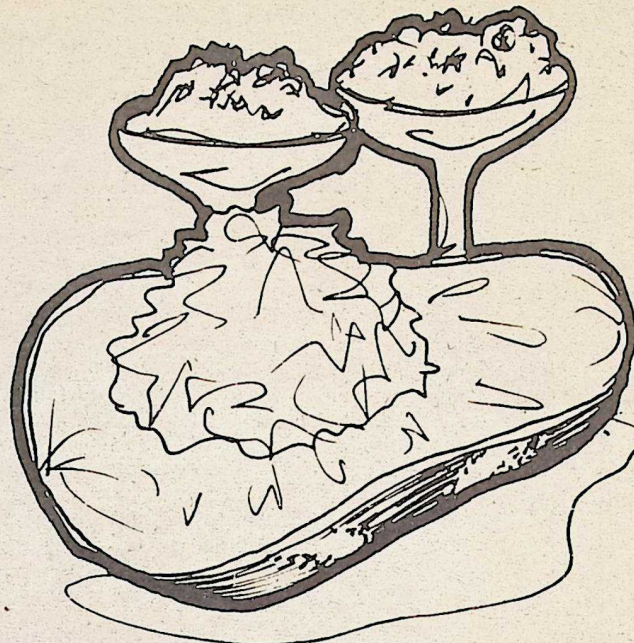
Unlike most other fruits, an avocado half is served most often as part of a main course; its boat-shape lends itself masterfully to making an edible shell for either fish or fowl salads. Into the cavity left when the large seed is removed may be piled any choice of fillings.

Aunt Olivia's most elegant luncheons for the ladies' "socials" often centered around **Curried Chicken in Avocado Shells**. First, put on to steam 1 cup of raw white rice in 3 cups of boiling water to which you have added 1 T. butter and 1 t. salt. Combine the following in a heavy saucepan and cook until onion is transparent (3-4 minutes) remove from heat:

1/2 C. chopped, pared, cored apple  
1 small clove garlic, crushed  
1 t. curry powder  
1/4 C. chopped onion  
1/4 C. butter or margarine

Assemble the following ingredients:

1/3 C. flour  
1 C. milk  
2 C. cooked, diced, chicken meat  
1 t. salt  
1 t. pepper  
1 C. chicken broth



Add flour to mixture in saucepan and stir thoroughly. Add milk, broth, salt and pepper. Return to heat and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened. Add chicken and reheat.

Peel and halve three ripe avocados; brush with 1 T. lemon juice. Arrange the six avocado halves on a bed of the hot rice in a heat-proof baking dish. Bake in 350° oven ten minutes until heated through. Remove and fill halves with curried chicken mixture. Serve on warm plates. Spoon sauce over rice. Pass assortment of condiments. Serves six, of course.

Assorted condiments: crumbled crisp-cooked bacon, raisins, chutney, chopped peanuts, chopped candied ginger, chopped parsley, and lemon wedges.

Not everyone enjoys a strong flavor of curry such as that dominating the chicken recipe above. For those who prefer only a hint of curry, fill avocado halves with creamed crabmeat which has a delicate and distinct flavor of its own, a flavor no lover of crabmeat wants overwhelmed...Consider **Devilled Crab in Avocado**.

4 T. butter or oleo  
3 T. flour  
1/2 t. salt  
1/4 t. white pepper  
1/8 t. curry powder (optional)  
1 1/4 C. milk  
1 can (1/2 lb. frozen) crabmeat  
3 T. grated mild American cheese  
3 ripe avocados-halved, peeled

In saucepan, melt butter; remove pan from heat; blend in flour and seasonings. Return pan to low heat and stir in milk. Cook stirring constantly, until smooth and thick. Add the crabmeat. Remove from heat, but keep warm.

Place avocado halves in shallow pan. Heap crabmeat into cavities, sprinkle grated cheese on top, and pour just a

ed, at 375° for 15 minutes. Serve on heated plates to six hungry people. A tossed green salad with French dressing is good with this meal.

Although Aunt Olivia never shirked extra effort to obtain an excellent result, she sometimes laughed ruefully when passing on a recipe, saying, "That's doing it the hard way, Lydia," and she was right. We both knew it was easier to serve chicken, turkey, crabmeat, lobster, tunafish, or even egg salad in avocado halves than to prepare creamed sauces. When mixing any of the salad fillings, Aunt Olivia chopped approximately 1/4 C. of celery and half a small onion for each cup of diced fish, fowl, or for two hard-boiled eggs. She tossed them lightly with just enough mayonnaise to hold the mixture together. Served on a bed of lettuce and garnished with parsley, a lemon wedge, and two or three slices of tomato, avocado-stuffed salads make tasty and satisfying lunches.

Perhaps one of the best ways to use this special fruit is as a dip with a true Mexican flavor. Called guacamole (wah-kamo-lay), this dip is as easy as it is good. Pit, peel and mash two ripe avocados; add 2 T. lemon juice, 1 t. finely minced onion, 1/2 t. salt, and a dash of Worcestershire. If you prefer a hot dip, use Tabasco instead. Or should you like a "cool touch" in your guacamole, dice up and add one peeled cucumber.

Avocado sections speared on cocktail picks with a medley of other tidbits such as small boiled shrimp, cherry tomatoes, cubes of cheese, or any crisp raw vegetables in large dice make a good combination for nibbling. Don't, under any circumstances though, mistake avocado for diet fare! Delicate, nutlike flavor and buttery consistency should convey their own message: rich!

Should you have any doubts about the versatility of the fruit of the avocado tree, Aunt Olivia would refer you to recipes she had borrowed from other fine cooks, some with reputations to equal her own. One such is Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings who lived in Florida and wrote a cookbook describing ways to use that state's native foods. Ms. Rawlings served **Avocado Francis**—either as a salad on crisp lettuce or as a first course.

2 C. diced avocados  
1 C. very finely diced celery  
1/4 C. mayonnaise  
Chopped bacon  
1/2 C. chili sauce  
1 T. minced chives [important]  
Juice of 1/2 a lemon

Mix all ingredients except bacon, handling with a light touch. Let chill ten minutes in refrigerator. Serve in sherbet glasses or on lettuce (for salad). Over the top scatter 1 teaspoonful to a serving of chopped bacon that has been sauteed until brown, then drained well. "The flavor of this combination is exceptional," Ms. Rawlings wrote in "Cross Creek Cookbook."

As Uncle Henry said, "That's an understatement."