Did someone say guacamole? How about some homemade guacamole from your own backyard? It’s easy to grow the fruit that guacamole is made from – avocados. Native to Mexico, Guatemala, and the West Indies, avocados (*Persea americana* Miller), can be grown in the tropical and subtropical areas of the world, which, lucky for us, includes Central Florida.

Avocados are the most important fruit grown in many tropical countries around the world and were first brought to Florida in 1833. In the United States, avocados are also grown in California, Texas, and Hawaii.

The avocado fruit are described as a berry that consists of a single large seed, surrounded by a buttery pulp. The skin is variable in thickness and texture, depending on the variety. At maturity, the fruit color also varies and may be green, black, purple or reddish. The fruit shape ranges from round to oblong, and weighs anywhere from a few ounces to 5 lbs.

Avocados grow on a tree that can reach 30-65 feet tall. Some avocado trees are self-pollinating, which means that only one tree needs to be planted in order to produce fruit. However, most are not self-pollinating and require a second tree of a different cultivar to be planted near by. Therefore, when growing avocado trees, it is recommended to plant two different cultivars, that is if no other avocado tree is planted in your yard or even within your neighborhood.

Although it is possible to grow avocados from seed, most avocado varieties do not come true from seed, which means that they will not provide the same variety of avocado the seed came from. Therefore, they must be propagated through grafting. The easiest way to do this is to just buy a tree that is already grafted for you.

Trees should be planted in well-drained soils. Avocado trees do not tolerate flooding or poorly drained soils. Continuously wet or flooded conditions often result in decreased growth and fruit development, as well as other health issues, including possible death of the tree. If you plant more than one tree, space them 23-30 feet apart to allow them enough room to grow.

The fruit of the avocado does not generally ripen until it falls or is picked from the tree. In Florida, the fruit is considered sufficiently mature for harvest when it reaches a specified calendar date and weight or size indicated by the variety that is planted.

The easiest way to determine if your avocados are ready to harvest is to select one large fruit and place it on the kitchen counter. A mature fruit ripens in 3 to 8 days after it is picked. If the fruit does not ripen properly and either shrivels, becomes rubbery or rots at the stem, then select another fruit and repeat the test.

The fruit from an avocado tree does not have to be harvested all at the same time. This allows you to leave the fruit on the tree and pick fruit only when you want to eat it. Remember, it takes 3 to 8 days from the time you pick a fruit until it ripens and is ready to eat. As the season of harvest for any given variety passes there is an increased chance the fruit will fall from the tree. So although avocado fruit can be held on the tree, eventually they will drop.
Compared to other fruits, avocados are highly nutritious, a good source of potassium and a moderate source of Vitamin A. They do not contain cholesterol, and many Florida varieties have less total fats than California varieties, with only containing 3 to 15% oil. Cooking impairs flavor and appearance of avocados, but many frozen products can be prepared. The most popular ways of serving the avocado are in salads, as appetizers, dips, and as guacamole. The avocado has a variety of culinary uses and the delicate flavor appeals to the gourmet.

Information for this article was taken from the University of Florida/IFAS publication, “Avocado Growing in the Florida Home Landscape”. For more information on the varieties of avocados that should be grown in Florida, call to request a free copy of the publication mentioned. Contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at (321)-697-3000. They are available to take your calls and answer your gardening questions Monday thru Friday from 10am to 2pm.

Jennifer Welshans
Osceola County Extension
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
Date: November 11, 2007