

BOOK: AVOCADO: MEXICAN GREEN GOLD, MICHOACAN'S PRIDE

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Avocados, native from America, represented for the indigenous peoples from immemorial times a delicious fruit, highly requested, with extraordinary properties that go from aspects such as nutrition, healing, religion to cosmetics. Given their versatility of use and current commercial importance, this book was written, compiling 150 recipes, where this exquisite fruit is the main character. The recipes include a great variety, easy to prepare. Some of the recipes in the book are: traditional Mexican guacamole, with 9 ways of preparation; six recipes of sauce; 25 nutritious and fresh salads; delicious soups and creams (20), meats and rice (20); 20 recipes of tasty Mexican appetizers; fish and shellfish (17) and 5 desserts and snow. All these have the unique touch of the Mexican cuisine; but also, 10 recipes of international haute cuisine are included. Regarding cosmetology, 5 avocado-based preparations for the care of skin, hair and eyelashes are presented. With this work, Mexico and Michoacan spread and pass on to the world the culinary tradition of their valuable fruit: the avocado. They also contribute to the promotion and development of the culture of avocado consumption.

Keywords: Versatility, Uses, Consumption, Spreading, Culture.

LIBRO: EL AGUACATE: ORO VERDE DE MÉXICO, ORGULLO DE MICHOACÁN

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El Aguacate, originario de América, representó para los pueblos indígenas desde tiempos inmemoriales, un fruto delicioso muy apreciado con propiedades extraordinarias que van desde lo nutritivo, lo curativo, lo religioso hasta lo cosmetológico. Dada su versatilidad de usos e importancia comercial actual, se elaboró esta obra literaria que compila 150 recetas en las que este exquisito fruto es protagonista y que van desde platos salados o dulces, y de fácil preparación. Destaca la gran variedad de platillos que se pueden preparar con el aguacate, como el tradicional guacamole mexicano del que se presentan nueve formas distintas de preparación, seis recetas de salsas, 25 nutritivas y frescas ensaladas, deliciosas sopas y cremas (20), carnes y arroces (20); se presentan también 20 recetas de sabrosos antojitos mexicanos, pescados y mariscos (17) y 5 postres y nieves. Todas con el inigualable toque de la cocina mexicana; pero además, se incluyen 10 recetas de alta cocina internacional. En el rubro cosmetológico se presentan 5 preparaciones a base de aguacate destinadas al

cuidado de la piel, el cabello y las pestañas. Con esta obra México y Michoacán difunden y legan al mundo la tradición culinaria de su preciado fruto, el aguacate; y contribuye a la promoción y fomento de la cultura de su consumo.

Palabras clave: Versatilidad, Usos, Consumo, Difusión, Cultura.

The avocado: a gift from America to the whole world

The fruit that forms the central part of Mexican gastronomy, especially prized for its flavour and nutritional and medicinal properties, the avocado, also has a curious history.

Its name is derived from *ahuacatl*, *nahuatl* word that means “tree testicles”. In Peru it is known as avocado, or *palto*, which comes from the quichua word, palta.

Long before the arrival of the Spanish to America, the avocado already was forming part of the diet of the Aztecs and other American peoples. Today about fifty kinds are cultivated, from the south of Mexico to Peru.

From the beginning of the conquest, the avocado impressed the Spanish so much that in the chronicles regional appear assorted descriptions of the shape of the tree, its regional name, its flavour, and some of its medicinal properties.

In the XVI century we find the first documented reference to this tropical fruit made by Mr. Martin Fernandez de Enciso, having discovered it on the Colombian Atlantic Coast.

In his sumari of “Natural History of the Indies”, the famous chronicler Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo confuses the avocado with the pear when he calls it “Which is not surprising, since by its size (some fifteen centimetres long and ten centimetres thick) and shape, the avocado could well be a relative of the large pear.

But if Fernandez de Oviedo confuses THE AVOCADO WITH TH PEAR, THE Inca Garcilaso de la Vega clarifies that “the fruit that the Spanish call pear, because it looks like that of Spain in the green colour and in the shape; the Indians call it palta because of a province of this name from which news of the avocado was communicated to the others”.

As far as he is concerned, the monk Bernardino of Sahagun uses the name that the indigenous people gave to the avocado: *ahuacatl*.

The honour of having made the first technical description of de avocado corresponded to don Francisco Hernandez in his History of de plants.

The notes made by the Spaniards about the avocado were not limited to the descriptions of the tree. They noticed, among other things, the different types of avocado that existed in America.

The testimony of the father Colbo, also is very interesting, not only because it describes the Peruvian avocado, but also because it compares it with those of Guatemala and Mexico, which shows us that back then our avocado was already known to the rest of America.

But the interest of the chronicler and Spanish botanists also was geared toward other curious aspects. For example, the manner in which the indigenous people ate the avocado:

Also they were interested in their medicinal and seed of the avocado could be used in numerous remedies.

On their aphrodisiac properties, the Spanish chroniclers noted that the avocado improved the sexual appetite and the quantity of semen. The avocado not only seduced the Spaniards, two travellers of the XVI century —the Englishman Job Horton, in 1568, and the Frenchman Samuel Champlain, 1599-1602— describe it as “palatable fruit” “the size of pears, very green on the outside”.

A century later, Gamelli Carreri recognizes that “certainly anyone who has eaten it, says that it is superior to any European fruit”.

From America, the Spaniards took them to the Antilles, the Portuguese planted them in Brazil, where already they were being grown in the XVII century. In 1833, Henry Perrine planted Mexican varieties of avocado in Miami. From there it jumped to California, where it wasn't until 1871 that it was grown in quantity.

In 1911, the horticulturist Carl Schmidt travelled to our country seeking the variety of avocado best adaptable to the climate of California. He found it in *Atlixco*. The avocado resulted so hearty that it resisted the tremendous frosts of 1913. In homage to its resistance, the Californian avocado, descendent of the Mexican variety received the Castilian name of El Fuerte (The strong One.)

The Spaniards also cultivated the avocado in the old world. In Spain it became acclimated, above all, in the Malaga, Murcia, Valencia, and Catalonia.

Cooking with avocados

The avocado is just as delicious when serve in elegant slices, diced, or served on the half shell, as when made into guacamole. Its great virtue consists in the fact that it does not need any seasoning to be absolutely delicious, although it goes well with many, and this is another virtue, either to intensify its natural flavour or to create new ones:

A pinch of salt or a few drops of lemon juice, for example, are two of its more frequent companions.

For many Mexicans, the lemon is the ideal companion of the avocado. It helps to preserve its colour as well as its great nourishing properties.

But the avocado admits equally to being marinated in a strong vinaigrette for a salad, or to the pulp being blended into a cream for an exquisite cold soup.

It sustains with stoicism being chopped and bathed in sauce of that other essential companion to the Mexican cuisine, the tomato, until obtaining an aristocratic avocado cocktail.

It goes well with all types of meats: with seafood (elvers, or baby eels, anchovies, and shrimp) and gives fish an exquisite touch; with red or chicken it emphasizes the Mexican flavour.

And, if this were not enough, it also goes well with sweets, and therefore it can not be left out of the dessert menu, either in the form of exotic avocado *mousse* or as the simple, but not less delicious, avocado ice cream.

Mexican cooking takes advantage of even the leaves of the avocado to season beans or sauces, or to wrap lamb before covering it in the maguey leaves for its slow roasting in the ground oven.

Varieties of avocados

Generally it is believed that the avocado comes from one specie that acquired different characteristics upon suffering the effects of the various climates where it was grown. However, there are those who sustain that this denomination: the Guatemala (*Persea schiedeana*); the West Indian race (*Persea americana*) and the Mexican (*Persea drimifolia*).

In the markets of Mexico four avocado types can be found, and each one occupies a specific place within the Mexican cuisine:

Criollo (native)

This variety has very thin skin, shiny black or dark green in colour. It has very little pulp of intensive green colour and large seed. Some eat it with the skin for its aromatic flavour. It can be eaten alone, with tacos, or with a tortilla just off the grill.

Fuerte

Stems from, the grafts made on California from the *Atlixco* avocado, to obtain a product more resistant to the American frosts, fleshier and more conducive to being transported for marketing.

The skin is thicker and the pulp is abundant, of whitish-green colour. It has a small seed, therefore it is ideal to use in salads, to fill with other ingredients, or to make sauces.

Hass

This variety has thick, black, rough skin. Its pulp is abundant, of light green colour; the seed is small. It is used in soups, sauces, and as accompaniment for entrees and snacks.

Pawa

This variety has hard skin, like a shell, of light and dark green colour. Its pulp is abundant, of lemon green colour and has a sweet flavour.

The medicinal powers of the avocado

Even before the Conquest, the indigenous people of America were attributing extraordinary powers to the avocado.

The Aztecs, for example, believed that the *ahuacatl*, called the “tree of the testes” because the shape of its fruits, was an aphrodisiac and linked it with the gods of fertility, reason for which it played a sacred role.

Because of its taste and substance, it was a fruit that was prohibited during the pre-Hispanic religious holidays in which chastity had to be observed.

This belief was shared by the Spaniards, who, through their first chroniclers, yielded testimony not only of its medicinal uses but of its “exciting” powers.

Thus it was said, for example, by don Francisco Hernandez in his first technical description of the fruit: “...the fruits are hot, agreeable to the taste and of nourishing quality, not at all bad, but greasy, moist and they excite the sexual appetite and increase the semen”.

But not only the Spaniards were led to believe this myth. There is a famous history about a king of France who sought tirelessly and paid high prices for the avocado, all for proving its aphrodisiac virtues.

The medicinal properties of the avocado.

Even if we can not conclusively prove the aphrodisiac powers of the avocado, it is a scientific fact that it is a substantially medicinal fruit due to the fact that its resins, vegetable fats, and carbohydrates nurture and cure the body. Certain varieties of avocado, eaten, whole, with the peel, possess anti-rachitic qualities and potent anti-parasitic power.

One can boil four avocado leaves in a quart of water, or the peel of an avocado in ½ quart of water, and drink a cup daily before breakfast, for two weeks. It is effective against intestinal parasites;

Teas prepared with avocado leaves and peel is also magnificent to combat menstrual cramps .

It can be prepared by boiling ten leaves and the whole peel of an avocado, in a quart of water.

The nutritional content of the avocado has been proven in laboratory testes: the avocado contains the same quantities of proteins as meat, with the advantage that it is does not produce toxins in the body. Furthermore, given its low sugar and starch content it is recommended to be included in the diet of diabetics.

Oil that is extracted from, the seed has several uses. If applied to the hair, it will help stop its falling out; if one massage the legs with it, and helps to go out and rheumatism.

In several states of Mexican republic they use of the avocado seeds soaked in alcohol as a cure for rheumatism has been reported. To prepare the infusion, one must soak three seeds in ½ quart of alcohol; then add ½ quart more and let mixture set it for one week. Then rub the affected part with the previous preparation and cover it completely with a piece of flannel.

The leaves are also used to cure fever and migraine, prepared as infusion, as explained above. For this, after it has cooled, apply it to the temples and forehead.

Also it is said that the peel of the avocado helps to alleviate headaches. Apply it like “headache plasters” on both temples, holding in place with a handkerchief tied around the head.

Beauty secrets using avocado

In addition to its nourishing properties, the avocado is great for beauty treatments. Due to the fact that its pulp is rich in vegetable fats; it is used in beauty saloons to make face masks for persons with dry skin.

Skin, hands, eyelashes, knees, elbows, heels and hair can be transformed and become soft, luminous and shiny. Embellishes and lengthen your eyelashes with the avocado seeds.

Avocado masks for your complexion

1. Avocado, plain yoghurt, lemon, and olive oil
2. Avocado and squash masks

3. Avocado
4. Avocado with olive oil and lemon juice
5. Avocado with cream and wheat

Smooth skin with avocados

To beautify hands, knees, elbows and heels: make a cream by whipping plain avocado pulp: mix the pulp of half an avocado, with one teaspoon of almond oil and whip to form a cream.

Apply at night to hands, knees, elbows and heels, two or three times a week, for at least an hour.

Remove the cream with hot towels or take an invigorating shower.

“Avocado will make your hair shiny, luxurious, silky, and abundant”

Las, but not least... keep your garden and house plants beautiful with avocado peel.

Don't throw away those avocado peels; Better, use them with any left over delicious avocado. Every week or two, apply avocado with a soft massaging motion to each one of the leaves of your plants, you will see a big difference: a shiny, perkier plant, and many new leaves.

Remember that the avocado without Chile is pure, with add Chile and it becomes true guacamole”. It is clear that guacamole is a true work of art, the legitimate use of the three *nahuas* ingredients that go into it: avocado, tomato and Chile” (Historia gastronomica de la ciudad de Mexico, Salvador Novo, 1967).

Conclusions:

1.- The amplitude of the world of the avocado, forces to look for new horizons to wards which they still do not have access to this fruit. Finally is our job present this type of works in this commercialised world.

2.- With this work Mexico and Michoacan diffuse and they bequeath to the world the culinary tradition of their valuable fruit, the avocado; and it contributes to the promotion and development of the culture of their consumption.