

# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Avocado



The oldest discovery of an avocado pit comes from Coxcatlan Cave, Mexico, dating from around 9,000 to 10,000 years ago. Other caves in the Tehuacan Valley from around the same time period also show early evidence for the presence and consumption of avocado. There is evidence for avocado use at Norte Chico civilization sites in Peru by at least 3,200 years ago and at Caballo Muerto in Peru from around 3,800 to 4,500 years ago.

The native, undomesticated variety is known as a *criollo*, and is small, with dark black skin, and contains a large seed. It probably coevolved with the now extinct megafauna. The avocado tree also has a long history of cultivation in Central and South America, likely beginning as early as 5,000 BC. A water jar shaped like an avocado, dating to AD 900, was discovered in the pre-Incan city of Chan Chan.

The first detailed account that unequivocally describes the avocado was given by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés in 1526. The first written record in English of the use of the word 'avocado' was by Hans Sloane, who coined the

term, in a 1696 index of Jamaican plants. The plant was introduced to Spain in 1601, Indonesia around 1750, Mauritius in 1780, Brazil in 1809, The United States mainland in 1825, South Africa and Australia in the late 19th century, and the Ottoman Empire in 1908. In the United States, the avocado was introduced to Florida and Hawaii in 1833 and in California in 1856.

Before 1915, the avocado was commonly referred to in California as *ahuacate* and in Florida as *alligator pear*. In 1915, the California Avocado Association introduced the then-innovative term *avocado* to refer to the plant.

Indoors, an avocado tree is usually grown from the pit of an avocado fruit. This is often done by removing the pit from a ripe, unrefrigerated avocado fruit. The pit is then stabbed with three or four toothpicks, about one-third of the way up from the flat end. The pit is placed in a jar or vase containing tepid water. It should split in four to six weeks and yield roots and a sprout.

If there is no change by this time, the avocado pit is discarded. Once the stem has grown a few inches, it is placed in a pot with soil. It should be watered every few days. Avocados have been known to grow large, so owners must be ready to re-pot the plant several times. In addition to the fruit, the leaves of Mexican avocados are used in some cuisines as a spice, with a flavour somewhat reminiscent of anise, they are sold both dried and fresh, toasted before use, and either crumbled or used whole, commonly in bean dishes.

Mexico is by far the world's largest avocado growing country, producing several times more than the second largest producer. In 2013, the total area dedicated to avocado production was 188,723 hectares, and the harvest was 2.03 million tonnes in 2017. The states that produce the most are México, Morelos, Nayarit, Puebla, and Michoacán, accounting for 86% of the total.

In Michoacán, the cultivation is complicated by the existence of drug cartels that extort protection fees from cultivators. They are reported to exact 2000 Mexican pesos per hectare from avocado farmers and 1 to 3 pesos/kg of harvested fruit.

See [Plant Facts](#) for a database of information about plants around the world.