

The many health benefits of the avocado

By Mary Welch-Bezemek Special to this Newspaper/Imperial Valley | Posted: Thursday, July 9, 2015 12:20 am

This week I continue with the fruit and vegetable series as we take a look at the avocado, or in Spanish the aguacate. Avocados are a nutrient-dense food, which means they provide substantial amounts of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients with relatively few calories. One-fifth of a medium avocado has 50 calories and contributes nearly 20 vitamins and minerals. Avocados are naturally sodium- and cholesterol-free and virtually the only fruit (yes it is a fruit), that contains monounsaturated fat, which is considered the good fat!

According to the American Heart Association, mono and polyunsaturated fats, when consumed in moderation and eaten in place of saturated or trans fats, can help reduce blood cholesterol levels and decrease risk for heart disease. Avocados are one of the few fruits that provide “good fats.” Over 75 percent of the fat in avocados is unsaturated, making them a great substitute for foods high in saturated fat. When used in place of other fats such as a spread on a sandwich or as a dip (guacamole), the fruit may help you control your blood pressure and the creamy texture of the fruit helps make dishes satisfyingly delicious.

Avocados can also act as a nutrient booster by helping increase the absorption of fat soluble nutrients like vitamins A, D, K and E. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 recommends Americans increase their intake of dietary fiber and states dietary fiber that occurs naturally in foods may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and Type 2 diabetes, as well as help provide a feeling of fullness. One-fifth of a medium avocado provides 8 percent of the daily value for fiber, while enjoying one-half of a medium avocado provides 20 percent of the daily value for fiber.

Avocados tend to grow best in warm climates, but defining their precise season can be something of a challenge as it can vary so much from place to place. In regions where the weather is generally temperate year-round, the fruit may always be in season. In most locations, though, the primary growing season begins in the spring and continues through the autumn. Many commercial grocery stores will aim to keep the fruits constantly in stock.

The state of California is one of the world’s largest producers of avocados. In California the avocado is generally available beginning in late March and ending in early to mid-September, though a lot depends on weather patterns, storms and basic growing conditions. Droughts and unusually cold weather tend to reduce crop availability. Avocados also grow well in Mexico and Central America.

Avocados are a fresh, natural, wholesome part of a healthy diet. They're irresistibly rich in flavor as well as providing vital nutrients and phytochemicals. There are 13 vitamins that the body absolutely needs: vitamins A, C, D, E, K and the B vitamins (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, biotin, vitamin B-6, B-12 and folate). Avocados naturally contain many of these vitamins. So, the next time you enjoy the avocado, pat yourself on the back for picking a nutrient-dense food that is truly delicious and satisfying.