



..... THIS MONTH
WE'RE HARVESTING

Avocados!

In This Issue



AND MORE!

Farmer Spotlight

RACHAEL LAENEN - KIMBALL RANCHES-EL HOGAR
SANTA PAULA, CA



Nestled between Santa Paula and Fillmore in Ventura County, Kimball Ranches has produced crops for generations. Today, sixth-generation farmer Rachael Laenen works alongside her family and eight full-time employees to manage the family's 320 acres. About 150 acres are planted with avocados; the rest is steep hillsides where farming isn't possible.

South-facing slopes, rocky soil, and coastal influence create ideal avocado conditions. "Good drainage is key," Laenen said. "Avocados like moisture, but they don't like wet feet." Over the years, crops have ranged from lima beans to walnuts, but since 1984 the focus has been avocados.

The ranch primarily grows Hass, the bumpy-skinned variety common in grocery stores, with some Bacon and Zutano trees as pollinizers. "Hass grows well here, ships well, and has great flavor," Laenen said.

Avocados have a unique cycle. After planting, trees take three years to bear fruit and reach full production in seven to ten years. They are "alternate bearing," supporting two crops at once: maturing fruit and next year's flower buds. Flowering

occurs from April to June, and the fruit from that bloom is usually harvested beginning the following February.

Knowing when to pick takes skill. Growers watch fruit size, weight, and color. "When the green dulls and the weight increases, it's getting close," Laenen said. All harvesting is done by hand using clippers, long poles, and ladders.

After picking, fruit is loaded into bins, taken to a packinghouse, washed, graded, and sized before shipping to buyers—mostly in the western U.S. "California avocados demand a premium," Laenen said. "They're closer to the source, ripen naturally, and are grown under strict food safety standards."

In 2017, the Thomas Fire destroyed 70 percent of the orchard and the family's home, barn, office, equipment, and much of the irrigation system. Rather than rebuild the same, they improved, installing a million-gallon water tank, upgrading irrigation, and replanting with optimal spacing and rootstock. "It was awful, but it gave us the chance to start fresh," Laenen reflected.

For the Kimball family, success comes from adapting. "If you don't innovate, if you're not resilient, you're going to give up. That's not who we are."

FOOD for FUEL



Avocados provide unique health benefits. They are full of essential vitamins and a natural source of beneficial antioxidants.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE HEALTH BENEFITS
OF INCLUDING AVOCADOS IN YOUR DIET:

Healthy SKIN

The healthy fats found in avocados help keep skin hydrated, and the vitamin A in avocados helps keep your skin healthy.

Strong BRAIN

Avocados provide healthy fats and folate that support brain health, which can help you concentrate on difficult tasks.

Healthy HEART

Avocados support a healthy heart by providing good fats and potassium, which help maintain healthy blood pressure.



FROGGY FACE TOAST

Turning avocado toast into a froggy-faced snack is a fun way to enjoy this creamy green fruit. With its smooth texture and mild flavor, avocado makes a great base for playful food art. Using simple ingredients, kids can create a snack while picking up a few kitchen skills like cutting, mashing, and toasting along the way. Makes two servings.

Ingredients:

- 1 English muffin
- 1 avocado
- 1 hard-boiled egg
- Shredded carrots
- Sliced olives

Tools:

Child-safe knife and cutting board, toaster, grater, small plate or tray for serving

Always check student information, especially allergies, before preparing or serving food to keep everyone safe.

(Adapted from joannasnannies.com)

Directions:

1. Gently wash all produce under cold running water.
2. Cut the English muffin in half and toast both halves until golden.
3. Cut the avocado in half, remove the pit, and scoop the flesh into a small bowl. Mash with a fork until smooth.
4. Spread the mashed avocado evenly over the toasted muffin halves.
5. Slice the hard-boiled egg into rounds. On each muffin half, place two egg slices near the top of the round to make the frog's eyes.
6. Place a sliced olive in the center of each egg round for the pupils.
7. Use shredded carrots to make a smile or tongue for the frog.
8. Arrange the froggy faces on a plate and serve right away.



Guacamole Showdown

In this hands-on activity, students will work in teams to create their own custom guacamole recipes. They'll choose ingredients, write step-by-step directions, and prepare their dip for a final taste test. A "celebrity judge" (that's you!) will sample each creation to determine which guac comes out on top in the Guacamole Showdown!

Objectives:

Students will work in teams to create and test a custom guacamole recipe. They will use descriptive language, sequence words, and measurements to write clear, step-by-step instructions.

California Standards:
CC ELA: W.3-5.2, W.3-5.4,
L.3-5.3, SL.3-5.1; CC Math:
3-5.MD.1

Materials: Ripe avocados, variety of mix-in ingredients (tomatoes, onions, cilantro, lime, salt, pepper, jalapeños, garlic, lemon, elote seasoning), small bowls, forks or spoons, plates, paper towels, measuring spoons, worksheet (page 3).

Procedure:

Before the lesson, the teacher will prepare and pre-cut all ingredients, then arrange them in separate containers at the front of the room.

1. Begin the lesson by having all students wash their hands thoroughly before handling any food.
2. Read the mini book, *The Avocado That Made History*. Review the origin, history, and nutritional benefits of avocados.
3. Explain the Guacamole Showdown challenge: teams will create their own guacamole recipes using a variety of prepared ingredients.
4. Divide students into small groups and provide each group with a bowl, utensils, and a worksheet.
5. Remind students to use caution when handling jalapeños, as they can irritate skin and eyes.
6. Groups discuss and decide which ingredients to include. Students write clear, step-by-step recipes using descriptive language and sequencing words.
7. Students follow their written recipes to mix their guacamole, practicing measuring and teamwork.
8. Once all teams have prepared their guacamole, the teacher (celebrity judge) tastes each creation to select a winner.
9. Invite students to share what they liked about their guacamole and reflect on teamwork, recipe writing, and trying new foods.

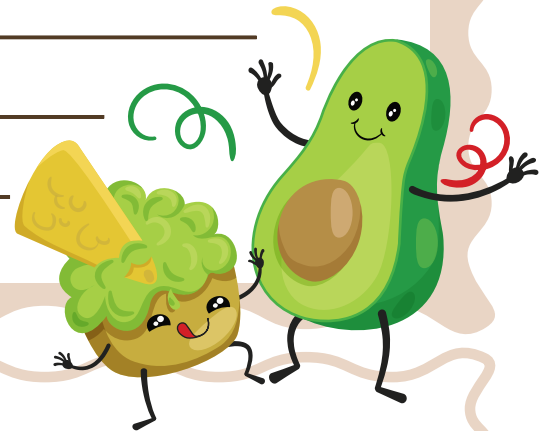
Guacamole SHOWDOWN

Recipe Name _____

Ingredients

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Tips



Steps

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

virtual



Join San Diego Ag in the Classroom on a field trip to Del Rey Avocado, where avocados are carefully grown, packed, and shipped. Explore how this farm supports our food system and discover the steps that bring high-quality avocados from the grove to your table.



DIG DEEPER

These books, websites, and other resources will help you and your students learn more about avocados.

BOOKS



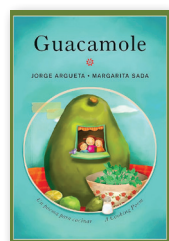
Avocado Magic by Taltal Levi

When Ellie worries she is not growing, her father shows her the magic of an avocado seed. As the seed begins to sprout, Ellie learns that growth takes time and

wonder. Includes instructions for growing your own avocado tree.

Bravo Avocado by Chana Stiefel

Avocado wants to be Today's Special at the farmer's market, but nothing seems to make her stand out. With the help of her fresh produce friends, she learns that what makes her special was inside her all along. This pun-filled story explores friendship, confidence, and self-discovery.



Guacamole by Jorge Argueta

This bilingual cooking poem follows a young girl as she joyfully prepares guacamole using fresh ingredients. With playful language and rich imagery, the story celebrates the beauty of food, family, and cultural

traditions. Includes a simple, kid-friendly recipe.

WEBSITES

californiaavocado.com

Showcasing the flavor and benefits of California-grown avocados, this site offers nutrition facts, tasty recipes, and helpful how-to guides. Visitors can explore the history, different varieties, ripening tips, and creative ways to enjoy this heart-healthy fruit.

learnaboutag.org

The California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom provides free resources to teachers. The resources highlight many of California's 350 agricultural commodities, including avocados.

loveonetoday.com

Created by the Hass Avocado Board, this site highlights the science-backed health benefits of fresh avocados. Explore easy recipes, nutrition facts, prep tips, and free wellness resources for every stage of life.

RESOURCES

Lesson Plan: Freshest Fruits (Grades K-2)

By California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

In this lesson, students explore the characteristics and nutritional benefits of fresh fruits, including avocados. Through hands-on observation, they examine the size, shape, texture, and seeds of a variety of fruits.

Science Project: Ripening Avocados (Grade 2-5)

By Education.com

In this science experiment, students test how quickly avocados ripen under different conditions—like in a bag with a banana or stored in the fridge. Along the way, they learn about ethylene gas and how it affects fruit ripening.



Partnering for Farm to School Success

Great things happen when classrooms and cafeterias work together! Discover resources and a special guide packed with creative ideas for partnering with your school nutrition program.

Download today at learnaboutag.org/farmtoschool.