



# Culinary Craftwork

## Newsletter: April 2010

### *The Delectable Avocado*



#### Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

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#### Introduction

This issue of the newsletter focuses on creamy, delicious avocados, with four great recipes: my own **Simply Sensational Guacamole (Page 4)**; **Javanese Avocado, Butter Lettuce & Tomato Salad (Page 7)**; **Avocado, Frisée & Grapefruit Salad (Page 9)**; and **Avocado & Tuna Tartare (Page 10)**.

Culinary Craftwork is my business, which specializes in offering private, semi-private, and group cooking classes. Some of you may remember me from when I taught cooking classes at Williams-Sonoma in Los Gatos. I am grateful to all of you who encouraged me to branch out on my own!

The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

*It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.*

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something new. The classes are fun, informal, and informative — and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef", so please don't be shy—email me with your questions.

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## Know Your Avocados

These are the two most commonly available varieties of avocado in the Bay Area.



**The Hass Avocado**



**The Fuerte Avocado**



## About the Avocado

My husband and I eat a lot of avocados: we love their subtle richness and find them addictive. We generally eat them in a salad of butter lettuce and tomatoes, or I make guacamole, but there are many other things that one can do with avocados if you want to get creative. Lately we've been fortunate to find avocados in the supermarket on sale priced at fifty cents each, which is the lowest price I've ever seen for avocados.

On a visit to New York City last year I ate in a upscale vegetarian restaurant called Gobo and ordered a sensational "avocado tartare," which prompted me to do some recipe research on the internet and come up with my own recipe. Despite the mass consumption of avocados in our home, I realized that I didn't know much about them apart from the fact that I preferred the Hass variety and purchased them according to price, which typically ranges from fifty cents to two dollars per avocado. Here are some fun facts that I learned about the avocado.

First of all, the avocado is a fruit, not a vegetable, just as tomatoes are also fruits. They are native to the Americas and were greatly prized by the Aztecs who believed that avocados enhanced sexual prowess. The Aztec word for avocado is *ahuacatl*, which means "testicle" apparently because of its shape. Some people call the avocado an alligator pear, because of its rough, nubby, dark green skin. When the Spanish explorers came to Mexico, they had trouble pronouncing the Aztec name and rechristened it as *aguacate*. Today, in Mexico they are still called *aguacate*, while in Spain the avocado is known as *abogado*; it was the English who translated *aguacate* to the easier-to-pronounce *avocado*.

There are two primary varieties of avocado found in our groceries, the Hass avocado, which was patented in 1935 and the Fuerte. Generally speaking, Hass avocados come from California and Latin America, while Fuertes are farmed primarily in Florida. Many stores incorrectly spell the Hass variety as Haas. In fact, the avocado was named for Rudolph Hass who developed it. Today, all Hass avocados, regardless of size, are derived from the one original tree planted by Rudolph Hass. Hass avocados dominate the market because they are available year 'round. In the United States 85% of Hass avocados are produced in San Diego, but we also import avocados from Mexico, Chile and the Caribbean.

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Avocados must reach full maturity before they are picked; however, they do not ripen/soften on the tree. The tree can actually be used as a storage unit by keeping the fruit on the tree for many months after maturing. The fruit is generally shipped mature, but hard; it ripens and softens at room temperature or (more slowly) in the refrigerator. Avocados darken to almost black as they ripen.

### How to Choose Avocados

Avocados, like all fruit, should feel heavy for their size. Ripe avocados will have darker skin than non-ripe avocados. To tell if an avocado is really perfectly ripe, hold it in the palm of your hand and gently squeeze. Is it hard as a rock? Not ripe. Squishy? Overripe. Have as much give as lightly chilled butter? Perfectly, divinely ripe.

### How to Store Avocados

Avocados continue to ripen after being picked, so feel free to buy under-ripe avocados and let them ripen to perfection at home. Leave them on the kitchen counter for slow ripening, speed up the process by putting them in a paper bag along with an apple or banana (to create ethylene gas), or slow the whole process down by putting them in the fridge.

### Health Benefits of Avocados

Avocados are very nutritious. They are a healthy substitution for foods rich in saturated fat, due to their mono and polyunsaturated fat content. Avocados have the highest fiber content of any fruit and contain vitamin B6, vitamin C, vitamin E, potassium, magnesium, and folate. They are also cholesterol and sodium free.

We're all familiar with that old adage, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," but perhaps that should be amended to an avocado a day because avocados have an amazing range of health benefits, perhaps even outstripping Swiss chard. The monounsaturated fats (avocado oil) helps to regulate our basal metabolic rate and lower our cholesterol. They have also been proven to help with long-term weight loss (though little weight loss is evident in the short term), and they are especially good for the heart and lowering blood pressure.

Despite the relatively high calorie count of avocados (roughly 240 calories per cup, 90% of calories from fat), new information indicates that avocados are an important dietary element: For more information from Regenerative Nutrition ([www.RegenerativeNutrition.com](http://www.RegenerativeNutrition.com)) [click here](#).

One cup of avocado has 23% of the recommended daily value of folate, also known as vitamin B9 or folic acid. Studies show that people who eat diets rich in folate have a much lower incidence of heart disease than those who don't. Avocados are also the best fruit source of vitamin E, an essential vitamin that protects against many diseases and helps maintain overall health. Vitamin E, monounsaturated fats, and glutathione (a powerful antioxidant) in avocados are also great for your heart.

If that isn't good enough, avocados provide powerful prevention of various types of cancer and have even been linked to the destruction of cancer cells in oral and prostate cancer. Breast cancer patients are advised to consume avocados in abundance as part of a cancer fighting diet, and research has also found that many nutrients are better absorbed when consumed along with avocado.

While researching the health benefits of avocados I discovered some interesting websites that are a fount of information, such as the World's Healthiest Foods, a not-for-profit organization, ([www.whfoods.com](http://www.whfoods.com)) and WebMD ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)). To see what the World's Healthiest Foods had to say about the avocado [click here](#). To see what WebMD had to say about the avocado [click here](#).

## Learn More about the Nutritional Attributes of the Avocado

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup, cubes 150g (150 g)	
Servings per container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 240	Calories from Fat 184
% Daily Value*	
<b>Total Fat</b> 22g	34%
Saturated Fat 3g	16%
Trans Fat	
<b>Cholesterol</b> 0mg	0%
<b>Sodium</b> 11mg	0%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 13g	4%
Dietary Fiber 10g	40%
Sugars 1g	
<b>Protein</b> 3g	
Vitamin A	4% • Vitamin C
Calcium	2% • Iron
	25%
	5%

\*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

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[www.NutritionData.com](http://www.NutritionData.com) is a good resource for nutritional information. To learn more about the Avocado [click here](#).

## A Note about Chips



Guacamole is typically served with tortilla chips, but not all chips are created equal. Recent experience reveals that some pre-packaged tortilla chips actually taste stale.

Heating the chips in a low oven, say 250 degrees, can definitely help; so can purchasing freshly made chips from a restaurant such as Chevy's, which sells their chips for \$3.99 per pound.

Chevy's chips are thin and light; they break easily, but they taste terrific with my guacamole recipe. There are many Chevy's restaurants sprinkled throughout the Bay Area, so you should be able to obtain fresh chips easily.

## Simply Sensational Guacamole



I've eaten many guacamoles in my time, and I've come to the conclusion that simpler is better. I used to put garlic and cumin in my guacamole, but it overpowered the flavor of the avocado. Some people like to put sour cream or mayonnaise into their guacamole in an effort to extend or enhance the dip, but all that accomplishes is to dilute the delicate flavor of the avocado.



The key is to have fresh, ripe ingredients and serve the guacamole as soon as possible after being prepared. Although the avocados get mashed, it is important not to over-mash them. A lumpy texture is desirable.

I like to start by getting all the ingredients ready before dicing the avocados in their skins and scooping out the flesh.

## Simply Sensational Guacamole

Makes about 2 cups of guacamole

### Ingredients

- 3 ripe avocados, halved, pitted and diced
- 1 lime, juiced
- ¼ cup finely diced onion or shallots
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 1–2 Roma (plum) tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 teaspoon seeded, minced Serrano chili (optional)
- Kosher salt to taste

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## A Step-by-Step Guide to Making Guacamole



1. Use the freshest possible ingredients.



2. Using a very sharp knife, dice the onions or shallots into ¼ -inch pieces.



3. Pare off the skin and outer flesh of the tomato into 4 or 5 sections. Cut into julienne strips, then align the strips and cross-cut them into ¼ -inch diced pieces. Discard the seedy center of the tomato, as it will make your guacamole watery.



4. Chop the cilantro into small rough-cut pieces.



5. Slit open the chili, and using the tip of your knife scrape out the seeds and discard.

### Freshness is Key



If you are making guacamole for a party, the temptation might be to make the guacamole ahead of time and store it, refrigerated, with the pit mixed in.

Many people believe that keeping the pit in the guacamole helps keep it from oxidizing, but the jury is out.

Here's what I would suggest instead: Get all your ingredients cut up and ready in the refrigerator. Don't be tempted to chop them in a food processor.

Cut up the avocados as close to serving time as possible; then, just mix in the rest of the ingredients. Your guests will love your guacamole and want the recipe!

## Dice the Avocados in Their Skin



Halve the avocados and pit them. Discard the pits.

An easy way to deal with dicing avocados is to hold the halved fruit in your hand then make a single cut through the flesh, down the center and several cross-cuts using a small knife.

Use a spoon to scoop out the flesh.

## A Step-by-Step Guide to Making Guacamole Continued



6. Slice the avocado in half and remove the pit.



7. Using a small, sharp knife, cut the avocado into ½ - inch chunks without slicing through the skin. Using a large spoon, scoop the chunks into a bowl. Add the lime juice to prevent the avocado from oxidizing.



8. Mash the avocado with a fork or potato masher, but leave the texture lumpy.



9. Fold in the remaining ingredients. Mix well and taste for seasoning. You may need to add more lime juice to brighten up the flavors.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

## Javanese Avocado, Butter Lettuce & Tomato Salad

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There's a little bit of a story behind the following recipe. Both my mom and my dad were good cooks, but I especially enjoyed cooking with my dad who was more inventive than my mom — particularly when it came to salad dressings.

One day he came up with a salad dressing inspired by Trader Vic's "Javanese Dressing," which was served with Limestone lettuce (also known as Bibb). As a child, I loved Trader Vic's and I loved my dad's version of their signature salad dressing (which he never wrote down). The following recipe for "Javanese Avocado & Tomato Salad" is my own creation based on my dad's salad dressing, which my husband & I eat at least once a week.

## Javanese Avocado, Butter Lettuce & Tomato Salad

Makes about two servings

### Ingredients

- One bag of pre-washed baby butter lettuce mix
- ½ cup sweet cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 1 ½ Hass avocados, cut in chunks
- ½ Hass avocado, sliced
- Javanese Dressing (recipe follows)

### Directions

In a medium-large bowl, combine one-half bag of pre-washed butter lettuce, halved cherry tomatoes, and avocado chunks.

Add several ladles of Javanese Dressing and toss together. Taste for seasoning and add Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Plate the salad and garnish it with several avocado slices.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

## For Simplicity's Sake, Use Pre-washed, Bagged Butter Lettuce



Using pre-washed, bagged lettuce will ensure that your salad is grit-free and crispy. Although it is slightly more expensive, the quality of the greens is superb.

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## “Javanese” Dressing



My husband isn't what you'd call a salad lover, but he says that this salad dressing makes the dish “pop” for him. Try using it with other tossed salads containing vegetables for a zesty change.

## “Javanese” Dressing

Makes about 1 cup

### Ingredients

- 3 Tbs. Heinz ketchup
- 2 Tbs. Good-quality red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbs. Lemon juice
- 2 Tbs. Soy sauce
- ½ tsp. Celery seeds
- 1/8 tsp. Cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1/3 cup Light olive oil + 1 Tbs.
- 1 Tbs. Minced shallots
- 1 tsp. Minced garlic
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

### Directions

Measure the ketchup into a bowl. Whisk in the lemon juice, vinegar and soy sauce. Add the spices, then whisk in the olive oil, shallots and garlic. You probably won't need to add any salt because of the soy sauce.

Let the dressing sit at room temperature for half an hour before using to let the flavors meld.

In a large bowl combine the lettuce, cherry tomatoes and avocado chunks. Grind some black pepper over the salad. Dress the salad and gently toss everything together. Be careful not to mash the avocado chunks. Serve immediately and garnish each of the plates with several avocado slices.

Store left over dressing at room temperature for up to two days, or refrigerate. Bring the dressing back to room temperature before using.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)



## Avocado, Frisée and Grapefruit Salad

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### Use Frisée if Possible, in Preference to Common Chicory



This recipe was inspired by Chef Jamie Oliver’s “Avocado, Chicory & Grapefruit Salad,” which called for pomegranate seeds instead of the dried cranberries. I also added a teaspoon of Dijon mustard to the dressing for a little extra zest. The salad is light and bright — perfect for a warm spring day.

Frisée has a sweeter, more delicate taste, than chicory. The most reliable source is Whole Foods Market.

To check out Chef Jamie Oliver’s recipe “Avocado, Chicory & Grapefruit Salad” [click here](#).

## Avocado, Frisée and Grapefruit Salad

Makes 2 servings

### Ingredients

- 1 medium head of frisée greens (a type of chicory), cut and cleaned
- 1 Red grapefruit
- 1 Large Hass avocado
- ¼ cup dried cranberries
- 3 Tbs. mild tasting olive oil
- 2 Tbs. Grapefruit juice
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp. Honey
- Salt and black pepper

### Directions

1. Peel the grapefruit with a sharp knife, removing any white pith. Cut into segments (cutting between the membranes). Squeeze out any remaining juice and set aside (you’ll be using the juice for the dressing).
2. Slice the frisée into thin slices (from top to bottom) and place in a salad bowl.
3. Peel and slice the avocado into thick slices. Add to the salad bowl.
4. Make the dressing by mixing together the Dijon mustard, grapefruit juice, honey and olive oil.
5. To finish, add the grapefruit segments to the bowl, along with the dried cranberries; then gently mix in the salad dressing, using your hands to toss the ingredients together.
6. Season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

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## Wasabi & Lemongrass Pastes



These seasoning pastes are generally available in the produce section of your grocery.

If you've never used wasabi paste, be advised that it packs a punch and may make you sneeze. If you can't find wasabi paste in a tube, you can mix your own from wasabi powder, but it probably won't be as spicy.

Using lemongrass paste is an easy way to add subtle lemon flavor to a dish without adding acid. Using lemon juice in the tartare would chemically "cook" the tuna and turn it into ceviche, which while delicious, is not the goal.

## Avocado & Tuna Tartare



The following recipe is an Asian-inspired creation that I came up with using dill instead of the more typical cilantro for a unique taste. Feel free to substitute cilantro for dill if you like. This is an easy dish to make, although it does require hand-mincing the tuna, avocado, and the herbs. It is a stunning dish, and the photograph does not do it justice.

You will need to purchase the best quality tuna available, as the dish is eaten raw. Alternatively, if you are not fond of raw tuna, you can sauté the mixture briefly in a hot, non-stick pan and serve the tuna warm in a lettuce cup with the avocado tartare alongside.

### Avocado & Tuna Tartare

Makes 2 molded servings as an appetizer or light entree

#### Ingredients

##### Tuna Tartare

- 6 oz fresh Ahi, Yellowfin or Bluefin Tuna, trimmed of all sinew
- 1 tsp. Lemongrass paste (in a tube)
- ½ tsp. Wasabi paste (+/-)
- ¼ tsp. Sesame oil
- 1 tsp. Extra virgin olive oil + extra to drizzle over the top of the tuna
- 1 ½ tsp. Minced dill
- 1 Tbs. Minced chives
- Salt & freshly ground pepper to taste
- Two or more lime wedges

##### Avocado Tartare

- 2 small/medium Hass avocados
- 1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
- 2 tsp. Extra virgin olive oil
- ½ tsp. Minced dill
- ½ tsp. Minced chives
- 1 tsp. Wasabi paste (to taste)
- Salt & freshly ground pepper to taste

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

## Avocado & Tuna Tartare Continued

### Directions

#### Preparing the Tuna Tartare

Chill the tuna in the freezer for about half an hour until very firm but not frozen.

Combine the sesame oil, olive oil, lemongrass paste and wasabi paste in a small bowl; set aside.

Slice the tuna into thin (1/8-inch) strips. Stack the strips in pairs and slice lengthwise into thin strips. Cross-cut the strips into small dice. Transfer the minced tuna to a bowl.

Combine the tuna with the seasoning paste; then, gently stir in the minced herbs. Season to taste, then refrigerate the tuna.

#### Prepare the Avocado Mix

Cut the avocados in half and remove the pits. Scoop out the flesh with a large spoon. Cut the avocados in thin slices; stack the slices and slice them into lengthwise strips. Cross-cut the avocado strips into 1/8-inch dice. Transfer to a bowl.

Add the lime juice to the avocados and mix well.

Stir in the remaining ingredients and season to taste.

#### Assemble the Avocado and Tuna Tartare

Use a 3 1/2 -inch ring mold or biscuit cutter to shape the avocado layer on an individual serving plate.

Pack in the diced avocado mixture with a fork, pressing down on it firmly to form a one-inch layer; smooth the top.

Divide the tuna mixture in half. Spoon half of the mixture into the ring mold, pressing down firmly and evenly; smooth the top. Carefully lift up the mold and repeat the process over a second serving plate.

Decorate each plate with a sprinkling of chives and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil as seen in the picture. Serve with lime wedges on the side to squirt over the tuna.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

### Chill the Tuna in Your Freezer to Facilitate Hand-Dicing



Chill the tuna in the freezer until it is firm enough to dice with a sharp knife.

### Use a Ring-Mold or Biscuit Cutter to Form the Layers of Avocado & Tuna



Using a ring-mold to form foods is an easy “chef’s secret” to make your dish eye-appealing.

If you don’t own a ring-mold, you can improvise with a biscuit cutter. If you don’t have a biscuit cutter, you can serve the avocado and tuna tartare, free-form, in a martini glass.

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Alyssa

### Ask the Chef (Q&A)

#### Quickly Warming Creamy Cheeses

*Christine asks, "My husband and I lead very busy lives. Occasionally and usually without advanced planning we enjoy a glass of wine with Cambazola cheese and crackers. Since I normally don't have time to allow the cheese to naturally warm to room temperature I use the microwave on low, but half the time I end up melting it. Do you have any suggestions?"*

Reply: I have a technique that works extremely well. Remove the wedge of cheese from the refrigerator and cut off a slice approximately 1/2 inch thick and place it into a Ziploc bag. Then place the bagged cheese in a bowl of warm (not hot) water for about five minutes or so, until it has softened.

#### Ensuring Your Meat is Nice and Juicy

*Gina asks, "I use a meat thermometer to test my pork for doneness, but it still comes out dry. How can I get my meats to come out juicy?"*

Reply: There are two things you can do: first, most meat thermometers display the final temperature that you want to achieve. When you take a roast out of the oven (or even a grilled pork chop), it continues to cook while it rests. This is called "carry cooking." Resting is desirable, as it allows the juices to settle into the meat. Take your meat out of the oven when the thermometer reads 10 degrees less than the recommended temperature and let it rest for five or ten minutes until it reaches the final temperature that you are looking for. The second thing you can do is to brine your meats. The brining process yields tender, juicy roasts and chops. I give detailed instructions for brining in November 2009 newsletter, "All About Brining," which is posted on my website at [www.culinarycraftwork.com/home/newsletter](http://www.culinarycraftwork.com/home/newsletter) To quickly download that news letter [click here](#)

#### Getting the Most from Your Sauté Pan

*Tracy asks, "I bought an expensive "easy release" sauté pan, but my food still sticks to the bottom. It's frustrating.. I'm not sure if the problem is me or the pan."*

Reply: If your pan is a nonstick pan, it may be defective. However, if your pan is made from anodized aluminum (smooth, black surface, such as Calphalon), it is more likely your technique which is the problem. Make sure you preheat the pan before adding oil to it. Wait until the oil shimmers and a tiny piece of bread sizzles before putting your meat in the pan. Once you have added your meat, let it sit undisturbed for a few minutes; then, turn the meat. If it sticks, then it is not ready to turn. With an easy release pan, the food will release itself when ready to turn.

#### Assessing the Heat Factor in Chili Peppers

*Lainey asks, "How do I know which chili peppers hotter than others?"*

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Lainey, I'll cover chili peppers in more depth in an upcoming issue of the newsletter.