

The avocado story in Australia 1824 – 2000 as told through recipes.

2024

Lately I have been wondering about the culinary story of the avocado at the Australian table occasioned by finding Hensley Spain's 1977 *The Avocado Cookbook*.¹ When was the first recipe using the avocado published and what were the recipes along the way to 1977?

The earliest reference I found to the avocado (*Persea americana*) in Australia was in 1824 in a list of the fruit trees in the colony.

To shew to what a state of perfection our gardens are arriving, we take the opportunity of enumerating, amongst the multiplicity of productions, the following plants ... The tea (Thea Bohea), custard apple, and alligator pear², are now brought to bear without any injury.³

So, I took as my starting point 1824. Mulling it over I pushed the end point to 2000 when restaurateur Bill Granger published his recipe for avocado on toast, now an Australian culinary icon.⁴

Early culinary days

The earliest reference to the culinary use of the avocado was in 1844:

The fruit (of the avocado) which is of the size of our largest pears, is firm in pulp, and of a delicate, rich flavour, but withal so mild, that some pungent substance, as pepper or salt, is commonly used with it: it is esteemed to be both wholesome and nourishing, and gains upon the palate of persons who use it. It may be propagated by layers and by budding or grafting; and its introduction would be an acquisition.⁵

In a 1911 recipe the 'something pungent' was salt, vinegar, and oil – a proto vinaigrette.⁶ In the same recipe the avocado made its first appearance with seafood:

Of the foreign fruits available, the Avocado pear, which is very highly appreciated in America and the West Indies, is excellent prepared with salt, vinegar, and oil and is served sometimes with lobster and other shellfish.

It wasn't only the flavour of the avocado that was being promoted. In 1924 the 'better class' of avocados was being lauded as 'the most nutritious fruit known, and provides a greater oil content than the olive with a more palatable taste than processed olive oil'.⁷ In 1927 *The Week* said:

Analysis shows that the avocado pear is a substitute, for milk and eggs, it ranks higher than the average olive in oil contents, the protein and mineral contents are more than twice' as great as that of other fresh fruits, and the energy value is more than that of lean meat.⁸

¹ Spain, Hensley, *The Avocado Cookbook* Southwood Press Pty Ltd 1977

² Alligator Pear was another name for the avocado because of the fancied likeness of the avocado peel to an alligator's skin.

³ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Advertiser* 22 April 1824 p.2

⁴ Granger, Bill, *Sydney Food* Murdoch Books 2000 p.66

⁵ 'The Alligator (or Avocado) Pear' *Fruiticulture, Adelaide Observer* 30 November 1844 p.8

⁶ 'Fruit Salads', *Observer* 7 Jan 1911 p.5

⁷ 'Avocado Pears', *The Land* 11 June 1924 p.15

⁸ 'The Avocado Pear', *The Week* 10 Jun e1927 p.

Broadening the avocado's culinary profile

Avocados from Queensland were noted as selling 'very freely in the Sydney and Melbourne markets at good prices' in June 1927.⁹ What were they being used for?

One of the common uses for the avocado was in a salad. Opera singer Grace Moore said the *Dandenong Journal* 'appreciates the value of vegetables and fruits in preserving the beauty of the voice as well as the figure and arranges her luncheon salads to suit her taste'. Here is her 1931 recipe for avocado and grapefruit salad:

... her favourite recipe consisting, of: three medium sized avocados, cut in strips, then in dice and placed in a cold, bowl rubbed with clover or crushed garlic; two diced pimentos, one diced green pepper and one heart of lettuce torn in fine strips are added. The salad is completed with the addition of two thirds cupful of lemon French dressing.¹⁰

Surprisingly, the first recipe for guacamole was this from 1945:

As an appetiser, Guacamole is particularly suited to a (Mexican meal) and, is simple to prepare. First, peel an avocado remove the seed and put the pulp through a sieve; if it is ripe enough, mash with a fork. Peel and chop one tomato and mix it into avocado pulp to keep it from darkening. Add one tablespoon of lemon juice, one teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce one half teaspoon of salt, one small onion, minced, and two dashes of hot pepper sauce. Chill and serve in bowl as a spread.¹¹

Over the following years there were several recipes for guacamole.

One of the avocado's selling points was as a substitute for butter.

Mrs. J. S. Low, of Nambour, wins "Brisbane Telegraph" competition prize today with her suggestion for making butterless sandwiches. Here it is: Remove skin and seed from one avocado. Season well with salt and pepper, and mash with a fork. Add three tablespoons of finely chopped lettuce leaves, one tablespoon grated carrot, and mix well. Spread on thin slices of wholemeal bread.¹²

In the 1950s there were recipes for, Avocado Savoury Spread (1950)¹³ and Frosted Club Sandwich (1954)¹⁴. And this one which gives me the culinary shudders.

Mrs. E. Stevens, Union Road, Penrith, wins our £4 award -for this recipe for Jellied Chicken Avocado

Required: One 3 ½ to 4lb boiling fowl: 2 slices onion:v2 or 3 celery leaves: 1 small carrot: 2 tablespoons gelatine: 3 ½ cups chicken stock: 1 tablespoon lemon juice: 1 teaspoon scraped onion: salt: pepper: 1 firm ripe avocado: 1 cup finely diced celery: 4 cup mayonnaise: 2 extra teaspoons lemon juice: 4 teaspoon curry powder.

Method: Wash and joint fowl, place in a pan with onion, celery leaves, chopped carrot, salt. Cover with water, simmer until fowl is quite tender, or pressure cook 35 to 40 minutes in pint water.

⁹ 'The Avocado Pear', *The Week* 10 June 1927 p.12

¹⁰ 'Grace Moore proud of her avocado salad', *The Dandenong Journal* 23 April 1931 p.3

¹¹ 'Foods of the America South West', *American Women's Newsletter, Cairn's Post* 26 October 1945 p.

¹² 'Butterless Sandwiches' Recipe Competition, *Brisbane Telegraph* 27 April 1948 p.7

¹³ 'Avocado Savoury Spread', *Brisbane Telegraph* 19 April 1950 p.24

¹⁴ 'Frosted Club Sandwich', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 8 December 1954 p.40

Reserve 3 ½ cups of the stock, if pressure cooked add extra water to make 3 ½ cups.

Soften gelatine in 1 cup boiling stock, mix with balance. stir until dissolved. Add lemon juice, onion, salt and pepper to taste.

Set about 1 cup in wetted mould.

Peel avocado cut half into lengthwise slices. Arrange in mould.

Add a little more jelly, chill. Mix diced chicken flesh with celery and other half of avocado cut into dice.

Fill into mould. Chill until firm. Unmould, serve with salad ingredients and mayonnaise flavoured with extra lemon juice and curry powder.¹⁵

The road to icon status

In the second half of the 20th century, I suggest, there were three markers of a food being part of the Australian table: a feature article in the *Australian Women's Weekly*, a cookery book solely with recipes using that food, and a recipe by the doyenne of Australian cookery Margaret Fulton.

In 1965 the avocado achieved the first of these with a double page spread in the *Australian Women's Weekly*.¹⁶ Sixteen recipes were given including Avocado and Oysters, Avocado Cocktail, Avocado Slaw, and Avocados with Tartare Sauce.

A couple of personal highlights:

Avocados Madrilene

Two avocados, lemon juice, 2 cans consommé madrilène, salt, pepper, lemon wedges.

Place consommé madrilène in refrigerator; chill overnight. Halve avocados, remove stones, brush with lemon juice. Spoon in chilled, jellied consommé; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Serve with lemon wedges.¹⁷

Curried Avocado Dip

Two medium-sized avocados, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 2 slices bacon, 1 teaspoon curry powder, 1 clove garlic (crushed), 1 tablespoon chopped chives, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce, few drops tabasco sauce, salt to taste.¹⁸

Twelve years later in 1977 the avocado got its own cookery book, Hensley Spain's *The Avocado Cookbook* with 150 recipes.¹⁹ Some of the recipes were adaptations of already existing recipes – Seafood Bisque²⁰, Avocado Waldorf²¹, Avocado Quiche²² B. L. T. (bacon lettuce and tomato burger or sandwich) Avocado²³. The avocado broke out of its Australian culinary constrictions with recipes like

¹⁵ 'Jellied Chicken Avocado' Prize Recipe, *Truth* 26 December 1954 p.30

¹⁶ 'Avocado Dishes', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 11 August 1965 pp. 34-35

¹⁷ 'Avocados Madrilene', *Avocado Dishes, The Australian Women's Weekly* 11 August 1965 pp. 34

¹⁸ 'Curried Avocado Dip', *The Australian Women's Weekly* 11 August 1965 pp. 34

¹⁹ Spain, Hensley, *The Avocado Cookbook* Wellington Lane 1970

²⁰ 'Seafood Bisque', Spain ... p.20

²¹ 'Avocado Waldorf', Spain ... p.41

²² 'Avocado Quiche', Spain ... p.51

²³ 'B.L.T. Avocado', Spain ... p.69

Avocado Schnitzel²⁴, Tempura²⁵, and Huevos Rancheros²⁶. Australia's engagement with its native foods was a decade away, in the meantime there was Avocado and Queensland Mudcrab:

2 avocados (halved and stoned)
1 tablespoon lemon juice
¼ cup Queensland mud crab meat (cooked and shredded)
1 lemon

Sprinkle the avocados with lemon juice.
Fill the cavities with fresh crab meat
Garnish with lemon wedges.²⁷

The book also took the avocado to the sweet end of the Australian table with recipes for Crepes²⁸, Avocado Sherbet²⁹, and Avocado Snow:

2 medium avocados (mashed)
4 teaspoons castor sugar
2 tablespoons lemon juice
3 egg whites

Force mashed avocados through sieve.
Add castor sugar and lemon juice and mix well.
Beat egg whites until stiff and fold into avocado mixture slowly.
Place in bowls, chill and serve with thickened cream.³⁰

The avocado achieved the third marker, a recipe by Margaret Fulton, in her 1983 *Encyclopedia of Food and Cookery*.³¹ There were 10 recipes including Avocado Mousse³², Avocado Grand Duc³³, and Avocado Pimiento Salad:

Crisp lettuce leaves,; 2 avocados,; peeled stoned and sliced, 2 canned pimientos diced or cut into strips; 8 black olives, halved and stoned; 3 tsps lemon juice; finely chopped parsley.
Dressing: 2 ½ tbsp oil; 2 tsps lemon juice; ½ tsp French mustard; few drops Tabasco sauce: salt and freshly ground pepper. Beat together dressing ingredients or shake them in a jar. Place lettuce leaves on four plates and arrange avocados on leaves. Add pimento, olives and lemon juice. Top with parsley.³⁴

In 1983 also Christine Heaslip published another cookery book dedicated to the avocado – The Complete Avocado Cookbook.³⁵

²⁴ 'Avocado Schnitzel', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.79

²⁵ 'Tempura', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.90

²⁶ 'Huevos Rancheros', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.55

²⁷ 'Avocado and Queensland Mudcrab', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.25

²⁸ 'Crepes', *The Avocado Cookbook* pp.130 - 1

²⁹ 'Avocado Sherbert', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.138

³⁰ 'Avocado Snow', *The Avocado Cookbook* p.137

³¹ Fulton, Margaret, *Encyclopedia of Food and Cookery* Octopus Books 1983

³² 'Avocado Mousse', Fulton ... 1983 p.17

³³ 'Avocado Grand Duc', Fulton ... 1983 p.17

³⁴ 'Avocado Pimiento Salad' Fulton ... 1983 p.18

³⁵ Heaslip, Christine, *The Complete Avocado Cookbook* Bay Books 1983

Happily ensconced now at the Australia table the avocado continued to widen its reach. There were recipes for 'Medallions of Spatchcock and Avocado' in 1986³⁶, 'Avocado Soup' in 1986³⁷, 'Macadamia and Avocado Cheeseball' in 1993³⁸, and Smoked Salmon and Avocado Terrine in 1995³⁹

Then in 2000 [restaurateur](#) Bill Granger published his recipe for Avocado Toast with Lime, Pepper and Coriander which achieved Australian icon status .

2 tbsp lime juice
2 tbsp olive oil
sea salt
freshly ground pepper
1 avocado, peeled and quartered
4 slices sourdough bread, toasted
coriander leaves

Place lime juice, olive oil, salt and pepper in a bowl and whisk until combined.
Serve quarters of avocado on toast, drizzled with dressing and topped with coriander, sea salt and lots of freshly ground pepper.⁴⁰

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The avocado continues to appear at the Australian table.

I asked my go to for current recipes and food trends my Facebook friends how they liked to eat avocado .

The two most frequent way of eating avocado were

- Halved and with any of pepper, salt, vinegar or vinaigrette. -
- Mashed on toast accompanied by with Vegemite or cheese or both.

Two others got honorary mentions:

- Guacamole
- In a salad.

There were other suggestions outside these simple ways:

- Toasted whole meal bread, a great deal of butter, smeared with ¼ of an avocado, drizzled with balsamic vinegar and topped with sliced organic tomatoes.
- Half an avocado with a poached egg on top.
- Covered in sesame seeds and fried, then into a salad.
- Cheese, tomato, and pepper jaffle
- As a drink - blended with some milk and chocolate syrup

³⁶ 'Medallions of Spatchcock and Avocado', *The Canberra Times* 11 December 1986 p.10

³⁷ 'Avocado Soup', Recipe, *The Australian Jewish News* 1 August 1986 p.33

³⁸ 'Macadamia and Avocado Cheeseball' Just nuts about macadamia, *The Canberra Times* 17 November 1993 p.20

³⁹ 'Smoked Salmon and Avocado Terrine' *The Canberra Times* 27 September 1995 p.27

⁴⁰ Granger, Bill, *Sydney Food* Murdoch Books 2000 p.66

As a measure of how well avocados have been incorporated into the Australian table in 2000 Australians ate around 1.5 kilos of avocados. By 2021/22 the consumption had tripled to 4.76 kilos per person each year.⁴¹

⁴¹ Tonkin, Leigh , 'Bill Granger brought avocado toast to cafes. It came to mean so much more for millennials and Australian culture' ABC News on line 28 December 2023