

## Dining Out

The New York Times

### Flavored to Win in the Dip Bowl

By DANA BOWEN

JUST as football fans will argue over every detail leading up to the Super Bowl on Sunday, food fans will be debating the chunkier points of guacamole. Should it be spicy or not? Is sour cream suitable or sacrilege? And what's traditional, tomatoes, tomatillos or neither?

Less contentious is the dip's popularity: this weekend's avocado consumption, the most for any weekend in the year, is estimated to be 43.8 million pounds, most of it in guacamole.

New York guacamole comes in countless guises, from minimalist mashes to ingredient-stocked purées. A fruity trend has lately emerged. At Mercadito in the East Village a guacamole sampler sings sweetly of mint and mango. And Miracle Grill, a guacamole traditionalist for 17 years, now offers a new-fangled pineapple version.

But Diana Kennedy, the cookbook author who has spent 40-plus years unraveling the mysteries of Mexican cuisine, was surprised when she encountered a pomegranate-peach guacamole in Comonfort, a small, fruit-blessed town.

"It's difficult to say what's traditional," Mrs. Kennedy said by phone from her home in Zitácuaro, Mexico.

She said the word "guacamole" stems from the Aztec "ahuacamulli," or avocado mash. Chilies and tomatoes were indigenous additions. The spice and tang cut through the fruit's fattiness. "The cilantro came with the Spaniards," Mrs. Kennedy added. So did onions. She favors a less-is-more, lumpy approach to draw attention to the avocados, which when ripe "are really so delicious in their own right." Over time the recipe became more elaborate. In an 1845 cookbook she found a reference to toasting jalapeños, a practice incidentally followed by Bobby Flay. "It brings out its oils, gives it a smoky flavor," he said.

Guacamole's ingredient list becomes even more elastic in the United States, where the vehicle of consumption switches from fresh tortillas to fried chips, an American invention, said Robb Walsh, the author of "The Tex-Mex Cookbook" (Broadway Books, 2004). The chips explain how guacamole morphed from a condiment to a dip, its volume often stretched with sour cream, mayonnaise or even low-fat yogurt.

"It's not something Mexicans would do," said Jim Moreno, the chief operating officer of Ninfa's, a Tex-Mex restaurant chain. The

#### TRADITIONAL GUACAMOLE

Adapted from "My Mexican Kitchen" by Diana Kennedy (Clarkson Potter, 2002)  
Time: 10 minutes

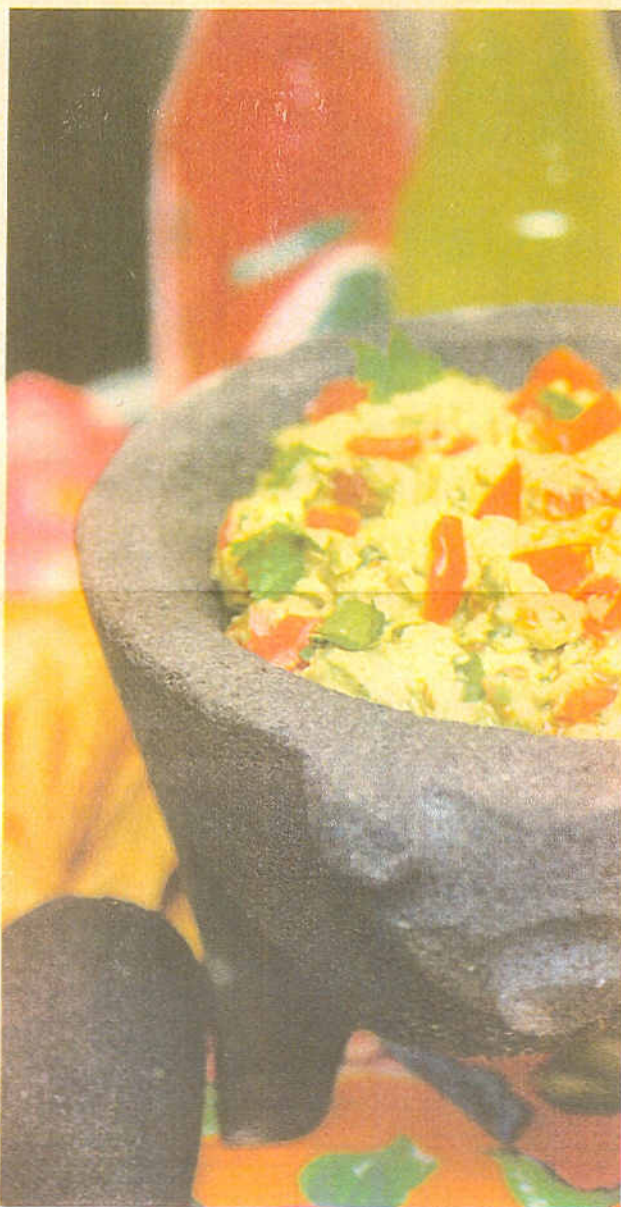
- 3 tablespoons white onion, finely chopped, with another tablespoon for garnish
- 4 serrano chilies (seeds and all), finely chopped or to taste
- 3 tablespoons cilantro, roughly chopped, with another tablespoon for garnish
- Sea salt to taste
- 3 avocados
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup tomatoes, finely chopped, with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup tomato for garnish.

1. Put onion, chilies, cilantro and salt into a molcajete, and crush to a paste. (Or puree in a blender and transfer to a mixing bowl).

2. Cut avocados in half, and without peeling remove pit, and squeeze out the flesh. Mash avocado into onion-serrano base and mix well. Stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of tomatoes.

3. Sprinkle the surface with garnishes:  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup tomato, onion and a tablespoon of finely chopped cilantro. Serve immediately.

Yield: About 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups.



OLD-FASHIONED Traditional guacamole served in a molcajete, a lava stone mortar.

#### NINFA'S GREEN SAUCE

Adapted from Ninfa's restaurants  
Time: 25 minutes

- 3 medium tomatoes (green or red), coarsely chopped
- 4 large tomatillos, husk removed and coarsely chopped
- 2 fresh jalapeño peppers, stems removed and coarsely chopped
- 3 cloves garlic
- 3 avocados
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups sour cream
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt.

1. In medium saucepan, bring tomatoes,

tomatillos, jalapeños, garlic and 2 cups water to boil. Reduce heat, and simmer until tomatillos are soft, about 10 minutes. Drain mixture, and reserve one cup cooking liquid.

2. Slice avocados in half, remove pit, and scoop flesh into blender. Add tomatillo mixture, sour cream, cilantro and salt. Puree until smooth. If mixture is too thick, slowly add a little of reserved cooking liquid.

3. Transfer to bowl and serve with tortilla chips or warmed tortillas.

Yield: About 5 cups.

original Houston location rose to fame in the 1970's for serving free bowls of its creamy avocado "green sauce." Delicious, yes. But guacamole? No, even he acknowledges.

Still, creamy guacamole derivatives remain a party staple and guilty pleasure among many home cooks. "I don't make this recipe in front of people," said Sean Williams, an actor from Astoria, Queens, whose guacamole includes bottled salsa, sour cream and green onions.

Most restaurants have nothing to hide. In fact making guacamole tableside with basalt, "molcajetes" and "tejolotes," traditional mortars and pestles, has become a popular way of proving freshness to diners.

"You'd never see this in Mexico," said Roberto Santibañez, the culinary director of Rosa Mexicano, which has been serving guacamole tableside since 1984. Mr. Santibañez, a native of Mexico City, said that in his country last-minute preparation is simply expected. (Those waiting more than a few minutes should press plastic wrap onto the dip's surface to prevent browning.)

The most popular avocado for guacamole is Hass, a buttery, thin-skinned California native. Some chefs — like Mr. Flay and Scott Linquist of Dos Carminos — use California Hass when it is available between January and August. Its oil content increases as the season progresses, making

It just isn't Super Sunday without the guacamole.

for richer guacamole. Of the 700 million pounds of Hass consumed in the United States, 430 million pounds are Californian. Most of the rest come from Mexico, which many chefs prefer because of the higher fat content, fuller flavor and lower price, when they can get them. Their sale has been restricted during California's season. But this month, the United States Department of Agriculture will open the market year-round in all but the three states that produce avocados, California, Florida and Hawaii.

Buying Mexican avocado pulp is an even cheaper option, and new technology called ultrahigh-pressure processing has improved its quality by eliminating the need for preservatives. Steven Tedesco, Fairway's chef, said he was surprised by its firm texture and fresh flavor.

AvoMex uses this process for its AvoClassic guacamole (available at Costco and Wegmans), a chunky, fresh-tasting, seasoned dip, and a bargain at about \$1.30 a pound. The company's founder, Don Bowden, said he designed a simple recipe so customers could add what they like.

"Guacamole is a lot like other things," he said from his office in Keller, Tex. "It's whatever you think it is."

#### MANGO-JICAMA GUACAMOLE

Adapted from Patricia Sandoval of Mercadito  
Time: 10 minutes

- 2 large avocados
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup Spanish onions, diced
- 1 cup tomatoes, diced
- 1 tablespoon serrano chilies, minced
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, roughly chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 2 tablespoons adobo sauce from canned chipotles (save peppers for later use)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup jicama, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup mango, diced.

1. Slice avocados in half, remove pits, and scoop flesh into large bowl. Mash, add the rest of the ingredients, and stir to combine.

2. Serve with tortilla chips.

Yield: About 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups.