

Fresh California Avocados: Proper Handling

Lab session developed by Ezra Eichelberger, C.H.E., Associate Dean of Hospitality and Service Management, Culinary Institute of American, Hyde Park, NY

Objectives: Upon completing this course, students will know:

- How to prepare dishes in view of the guests at an action station or tableside
- How to handle food products in a comfortable, sanitary manner by using French and Russian-style service techniques and utensils tableside or at an action station.
- How to properly peel, core, slice and plate an avocado in an efficient, eye-appealing and sanitary manner.
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I. Set-up and Techniques

45 minutes

- A) Discuss with students that upon graduation they may be asked to prepare a dish in front of a potential employer or be asked to perform a demonstration representing their employer. An effective demonstration could be the deciding factor of being offered a job
- B) Also discuss the public's ongoing interest in food, food preparation and popularity of action stations at banquets. Discuss how proper food handling techniques is useful in more situations than merely tableside presentations

The main issue is to get the students thinking about the difference between preparing food in the kitchen where they tend to take some short cuts as opposed to preparing food in front of guests where their performance must be impeccably sanitary, efficient, and friendly

- C) Discuss the three primary concerns of handling the food in a sanitary manner in front of diners, with the goal to make it look effortless while maintaining sanitary conditions:
 - 1) mise en place: **everything** in its place. Organization is key to a flawless performance, it is critical to make a checklist to ensure everything is on hand before starting the preparation
 - 2) utensils: everything must be spotlessly clean sharpened, and without any markings to identify its owner

- 3) technique: discuss the efficient method of opening, seeding/coring, and slicing an avocado – which students will practice at the end of this session
- D) Review the issues and importance of proper sanitation when performing at an action station or tableside. Ready-to-eat food should not be touched with bare hands; gloves are unappetizing and a false sense of sanitation. Another issue of cooking in front of guests is not being able to taste the food contrary to what is taught in the kitchen. So any recipe must be tested in advance and followed. Guests may have the option of altering the recipe, so there must be a basic concept of food combinations and balance
- E) One technique used tableside or at an action station is called “*pince*” which is French for pinch. Since preparing food in front of guests is a **performance**, it is better to execute a task that looks difficult with ease – and not to use tongs. A tablespoon or slightly larger and a dinner fork is sufficient
- 1) Have the students make an “OK” sign with their hand. Twist their wrist inward so their palm faces the ceiling
 - 2) Rest the end of the handle of the spoon on the middle, ring and pinky fingers so the end of the spoon handle is securely squeezed by the pinky
 - 3) Place the fork handle between the thumb and index finger with the tines to the ceiling. This is awkward for a few times then becomes much more comfortable. It is easier to practice this with a piece of bread rather than in thin air

Side Note: There is some controversy within the industry whether Tableside cooking is French service or Russian service. Ultimately, it doesn't matter; but historically, the Russians began carving meat tableside for official banquets. Once the concept was shared with the French, it was soon adopted, embellished with fancier costumes and flambé and claimed as French service. Hence the French terms for tableside equipment. Serving bread or other foods to the guests at the table with *pince* is actually French service, but is often referred to as serving bread “a la Russe” or “a la Francaise”

- F) Demonstrate the cut-seed/core-peel technique with an avocado
- 1) cut – hold the avocado in one hand, chef's knife in the other; puncture the skin; insert blade to the core/seed from one end to the other; rotate the avocado until knife is at the initial puncture area
 - 2) twist the avocado halves
 - 3) seed – strike the avocado seed with the chef's knife and twist; over the blunt side of the knife, pinch where the seed meets the blade
 - 4) slice or dice the avocado; scoop out the meat with the spoon
 - 5) arrange the avocado on the plate with fork and spoon

- G) As a class, identify the utensils required for a tableside presentation of Guacamole
- H) Have the class individually identify the utensils, equipment and ingredients required for an Avocado Caesar salad

- II. Working with Fresh Avocados** **1.5 hours**
- A) Each student will practice “pince” technique until successfully able to handle food properly
 - B) Working in teams of twos, each group will prepare mise en place for tableside guacamole and tableside Avocado Caesar salad
 - C) Each group will practice cutting-seeding-peeling Fresh California Avocados
 - D) Each group will then prepare a guacamole and an Avocado Caesar salad

- III. Tasting & Evaluation** **30 minutes**
- A) Presentation is evaluated and critiqued

- IV. Clean up and Closure** **30 minutes**

Ingredients Needed

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|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fresh California Avocados | Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano |
| Tomatoes | Egg (coddled or raw) |
| Red onion | Croutons |
| Cilantro | Powdered sugar |
| Lemons or Limes | Salt |
| Garlic | Pepper |
| Anchovies | |

Equipment Needed

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|--------------|------------------------|
| Wooden bowls | Dinner forks |
| Large spoons | Spoons for ingredients |
| Chef knife | Plates |