



HOW TO HARVEST AVOCADO



Introduction

Harvesting avocado is the collecting of avocado fruits from an orchard at the proper stage of maturity while ensuring minimum damage and loss. Avocados are harvested at physiologically mature stage and ripened for optimum quality.

Harvesting of avocado fruits

Avocado fruits are mostly harvested between April and September in Kenya. Since most varieties do not change colour on maturity, a few fruits should be picked and stored at room temperature for 7-10 days. If they soften without shrivelling, then the fruit is ready for harvesting. Fruits should not be pulled from the stalk but be cut off leaving 3 cm stalk and then trimmed to 8-10 mm stalk before transporting to the packhouse.



*Stalk of harvested avocado fruit been trimmed to 8-10 mm
(Courtesy Charity Gathambiri, KALRO)*

Timely harvesting of avocado fruits

Pick fruits during the cooler hours of the day, ideally before noon. After harvesting, promptly store them in a shade to prevent them from being exposed to direct sunlight. Leaving avocados in the sun can cause them to heat up, leading to faster ripening.



*Mature avocado fruits ready for harvesting
(Courtesy James Ndambuki, KALRO)*

Harvesting before maturity results in:

- Lower yields
- Higher proportion of immature fruits
- Poor fruit quality
- Un-even ripening

Harvesting after maturity results in:

- Fruit losses from over-ripening
- Losses caused by insects, rodents, birds, monkeys, etc

Manual harvesting of avocado fruits

Manual harvesting is done by standing on a ladder to pick them or use of a bucket and hook method or harvesting tool and should be done with utmost care to avoid mechanical damage. The Avocados are stacked in clean crates ready for transportation.



*Avocado harvesting ladder
(Courtesy Charity Gathambiri, KALRO)*

Avocado harvesting tool



*Fruit harvesting stick
(Courtesy Charity Gathambiri, KALRO)*



Fruit harvesting net



Avocado Harvesting Basket (Courtesy Charity Gathambiri, KALRO)

Harvesting and transport containers

Harvesting containers include:

- Crates (Nestable and foldable crates)



Nestable or Stackable
(Courtesy James Ndambuki, KALRO)



Foldable Crates
(Courtesy James Ndambuki, KALRO)

- Buckets



Bucket for harvesting avocado

- Baskets



Harvested avocado in a basket



Buckets are better than baskets in protecting avocado fruits from damage, since they do not collapse and squeeze them.

Empty the produce in crates for transport to the packing house.




*Avocados packed in crates for transportation to packhouse
(Courtesy Charity Gathambiri, KALRO)*

Precautions in harvesting

- Wash hands with soap and clean running water
- Harvest at proper maturity
- Handle carefully to avoid mechanical injuries
- Protect harvested avocados from direct sunshine (put under shade)
- Use clean sacks and, baskets

Frequency of harvesting is dictated by:

- Variety of avocado
- Prevailing climactic conditions
- Intensity of harvesting



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