



Ag at Large: Fans of quince promote the uncommon fruit

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By Don Curlee

Even in fruit-productive California, sources of the fragrant quince fruit are limited, but a few determined growers produce it and provide it for consumer enjoyment.

Sometimes described as a fuzzy apple, its ardent fans are relentless in their promotion of the golden globe of fruits. Like apples and pears, it carries its seeds in a core, is produced by an expansive tree, ripens in the fall and has ornamental relatives that grow on vines.

Recently, the quince has gained a reputation for making a unique cider and spicy wines produced in the mountains of Santa Cruz County. But raw product for crushing is basically produced elsewhere, even on small plots as far away as rural Oregon.

But customers for the fresh product, many of them in Eastern Canada, count on quince grown in the Terra Bella area in southeastern Tulare County. One grower there, considered major by quince industry standards, has been supplying the market for several years from 26 acres of the astringent fruit.

Although quince has been a solid source of revenue for him, and expansion is on his mind, the fruit ranked 45th of the top 45 fruit crops listed in Tulare County. Production in 2013 amounted to \$1.95 million.

The best chance of finding quince locally in the fresh state is at scattered farm stands and markets that dot Fresno and Tulare counties. One of them, the Vineyard Farmers Market, occupies a popular urban location in Fresno, where operator Richard Erganian proudly maintains a display of quince every year during its short season. Specialty grocery stores such as Whole Foods can be sources as well.

However, limited supplies and minimal growers do not reduce the enthusiasm that true fans of quince feel and express. One of the most vocal and persistent is Barbara Ghazarian of Pacific Grove. She so associates with the fruit that she calls herself the Queen of Quince. Ghazarian has written three books about quince, with recipes and history. A graduate of Wellesley College in molecular biology, she enjoys public appearances that allow her to discuss

the long history of quince in Middle Eastern countries and its origins in locations not far from the Garden of Eden, if anybody can ever pinpoint that. She points out that old world families cherished a quince tree almost as much as a member of the family. Boiling a batch of chopped-up quince brings its pectin to the fore, used then in canning fruits and for thickening and stretching other food dishes.

At the U. S. Department of Agriculture Experiment station in Corvallis, OR, John Postman admits that the quince has limited appeal, although one of his assignments is to maintain a focus on its potential and the broader possibilities for quince wood as a rootstock for breeding purposes.

The relatively wide range of negative responses leave Ghazarian undaunted. From her exalted throne room in Pacific Grove she has joined with the California Rare Fruit Growers to declare 2014 as the year of the quince. Her heirloom approach is compatible with the slow food, sustainable food movement and the fans of old fashioned cooking she refers to as fruit nerds. Ghazarian was a special guest speaker at The Quince Revival Swells — 2014 Festival of Fruit in Portland, Ore., Aug. 6-9. She talked about how to prepare such delicacies as candied quince, quince jam and chicken and quince stew. For the more adventurous, she emphasized the favorites of quince-orange pickles and a medley of quince chutneys, compotes, cobblers and sweets.

– Don Curlee is an agricultural writer based in Clovis.

http://www.appeal-democrat.com/opinion/ag-at-large-fans-of-quince-promote-the-uncommon-fruit/article_666d6e66-25d8-11e4-ae42-001a4bcf6878.html