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At Edible Monterey Bay, our mission is to celebrate the local food cultures of Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey Counties, season by season.

QUEEN OF QUINCE TAKES HER SHOW ON THE ROAD

By [Camilla M. Mann](#)

August 5, 2014 - Have you ever seen a quince? If not, you're not alone. It's classified as a rare fruit after all.

Quince is a paradox. Its shape is voluptuous; its aroma, reminiscent of guava, pineapple, pear, and vanilla; is heavenly. While it appears soft with its layer of fine fuzz, raw, it's rock-hard and formidable. If you make the mistake of putting a piece on your tongue, you won't soon forget its mouth-puckering astringency. It may be the only fruit that can't be eaten raw.

But once you cook quince, its flesh softens and turns pink. Some people assert that quince tastes like roses smell. I think it's even more exotic than that.

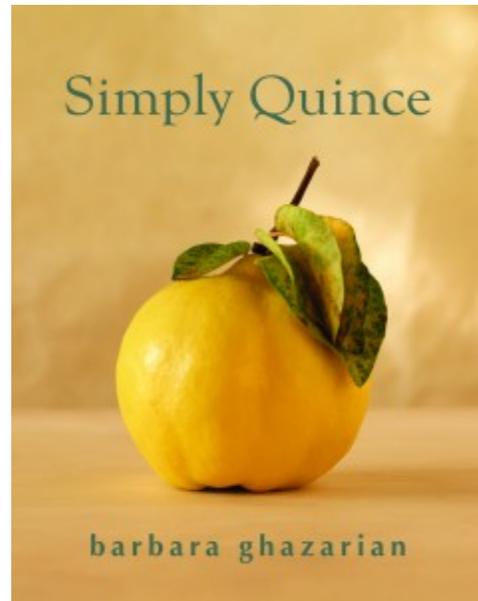
This week, Pacific Grove author and quincephile Barbara Ghazarian will deliver the keynote address at the 2014 Festival of Fruit, an annual conference held in historic Edgefield, Oregon. The conference is co-hosted by the California Rare Fruit Growers (CRFG), the Home Orchard Society (HOS) and the National Association of Fruit Explorers (NAFEX). And this year—2014—they have declared the Year is the Quince.



As she prepared to leave for Oregon, Ghazarian—the self-proclaimed Queen of Quince—made time to chat with me about her beloved quince. Ghazarian explained her fascination with the fruit, “Quince came from Armenia.” Passionate about sharing her Armenian ancestry with others, her first cookbook, published in 2004, *Simply Armenian: Naturally Healthy Ethnic Cooking Made Easy*, shared over 150 Armenian recipes with home-cooks. “But besides quince coming from Armenia, I just love the taste. I love the color change,” she said.

I had met Ghazarian a few years ago when she did a cooking presentation at the Holman Ranch Tasting Room in Carmel Valley. It was then that she fanned the flames

of my budding crush on this ancient, rare fruit. I’ll admit the color change is intriguing.



Ghazarian’s background in molecular biology from Wellesley College showed as she explained how the fruit’s phenolic compounds—anthroxanthins and anthrocyanins—transform when heated. “Through poaching,” she described, “quince transforms into succulent, salmon-colored wedges that retain their shape.”

It is precisely those wedges that Ghazarian credits with making quince accessible to this generation of cooks and diners. “Through poaching quince, I’ve made it into an ingredient,” she adding, mentioning a savory sidedish of stuffed cauliflower and quince. My mouth began to water

Quince was revered in times past. In ancient Greece, brides were often given quince as a token of fruitfulness. During Medieval times, the French prepared a kind of marmalade called cotignac. In fact, the word ‘marmalade’ derives from the Portuguese word for quince—marmelo. It’s no coincidence that the primary use for quince has been to help marmalades, jams, and jellies to set. The fruit contains a large amount of pectin.

“The nail in poor quince’s coffin,” Ghazarian said, “was Knox.” Boxed gelatin quickly hijacked the role that pectin-rich quince had played in preserving fruits.

Since the 2009 printing of her second cookbook *Simply Quince*, quince has been enjoying a revival. It’s a cookbook dedicated to revealing quince’s versatility. Her recipes include an array of savory-sweet stews, exotic mains, unique condiments, trendsetting salads, and spectacular

pastries. But, more than sharing recipes, Ghazarian sees her work as demystifying quince, inspiring people, returning quince to the table in whatever form. “I’m a benevolent queen,” she joked.

She mentioned a few people and companies doing interesting things with quince. San Carlos Quince, out of Eugene, Oregon, makes organic quince paste and quince butter. Vermont Quince has quince-ginger-lime chutney and quince-infused vinegars. And, locally, Randall Grahm, of Bonny Doon Vineyard in Santa Cruz, produces a French-style hard cider called ¿Querry? –made with two kinds of pears, four kinds of apples, and two kinds of quince.

Here on the central coast, quince season begins next month and continues until mid-November. Growers in the Central Valley have a longer season and will have quince through February. I can’t wait to start seeing those yellow, bulbous fruits appear in the markets. I’m already scheming about what I’m going to make.