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April/May Peak Items:

Cherimoyas: How to choose, store and prepare

(Eric Boyd / Los Angeles Times)

Cherimoyas: That's not a hand grenade, it's a cherimoya. This warty green fruit may not look like something you'd want to eat, but its rough exterior hides a heart that's pure custard. (In fact, one common nickname is the custard apple.) Cherimoyas are a tropical fruit, though they have a long history in California. They were first planted here in 1871, according to the California Rare Fruit Growers association. The flavor of the fruit reveals its heritage, for it is very sweet and wildly fragrant with a kind of tropical tutti-frutti appeal.



How to choose: Cherimoyas don't look very promising: The green skin is usually pretty dingy rather than bright, and there are often dark stains. (Really overripe fruit will be quite dark.) To choose a ripe one, squeeze it gently in the palm of your hand. (Don't use your fingers, they'll bruise the fruit!) When ripe, cherimoyas give to gentle pressure, similar to a pear or an avocado.

How to store: Cherimoyas are a tropical fruit, so they are very susceptible to chill damage if they get too cold. They are best stored at 55 degrees or warmer. But if you need to keep them for more than a day or two, you should refrigerate to keep from spoiling.

How to prepare: The best way to enjoy a really ripe cherimoya is also the easiest: Spoon out the fruit, discard the large black seeds and season the pulp with a squeeze of orange juice.

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Spring onions: How to choose, store and prepare

A spring onion isn't a type of onion; rather, it's an onion that has been harvested at an immature stage, when it has just begun to form a round bulb and the top is still green. At this point it will seem sweeter than a mature onion because it hasn't yet developed its full chemical complex, including the elements that give onions their characteristic bite. Really, though, it's probably more accurate to call it milder, since it hasn't developed its full sugar yet either.

At farmers markets you will find spring onions in all sorts of varieties -- red, white and yellow. Because they are immature, the flavors are pretty much interchangeable.



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How to choose: Look for onions that are fresh and glossy in appearance. The tops should be bright green and firm, not limp. Although these look a lot like the pencil-shaped green ones, they're actually a different type and can show anything from a slight bulge to a full-blown bulb.

How to store: Regular onions can be left out at room temperature for weeks, but because these onions are immature and full of moisture, they need to be kept refrigerated in a tightly sealed plastic bag. They'll last a couple of weeks.

How to prepare: Spring onions are really nice quartered lengthwise (leave the roots attached to hold them together), brushed with olive oil and grilled.