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Goji berries

(David Karp / For The Times / July 25, 2010)

Goji berries grown by Charles Garrigus in Selma, and sold by Harry Nicholas at the Beverly Hills farmers market.

Market Watch: Fresh goji berries make their debut

By David Karp, Special to the Los Angeles Times

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Goji berries, the much-hyped "superfruit" native to China, touted for their medicinal properties and surprisingly delicious too, are now available for the first time as fresh fruit at local farmers markets.

The berries, which sometimes still have their green stalks attached, are small, about the size of an average blueberry, but are elliptical or conical, often pointed at the end. They have smooth, thin, flaming red-orange skin, about the color of a ripe Hachiya persimmon; their texture ranges from firm to flabby, depending on ripeness; and their flavor varies from slightly vegetal and tomatoey, in a few underripe specimens, to rich and sweet, evoking persimmon, rose and raisin, with a spicy aftertaste. They're actually more interesting than one would think based on the dried fruits and juice of goji imported from China, which have become popular in recent years for their high antioxidant and phenolic content.

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The gojis available here now are grown by Chuck Garrigus, 47, a raisin farmer in Selma whose name may be familiar because his late grandfather, Charles B. Garrigus, was the poet laureate of California from 1966 to 2000. Chuck Garrigus became interested in goji about eight years ago when his daughter, then 8 years old, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and a teacher suggested that a "fruitaceutical" beverage containing goji would be good for her. Garrigus researched goji just to fend him off, but while doing so he became convinced himself of the fruit's healthful properties and began planting 4 acres of the bushy trees from seed imported from China.

The trees, which are certified organic, took their own sweet time to bear fruit, about four to six years, but half of them are now producing. Last year Garrigus shipped seven loads of his crop, packed in little plastic clamshells, to [Whole Foods](#) stores, but the delicate gojis proved quite perishable, so this year he's trying to sell directly to customers through farmers markets.

Harry Nicholas, one of the oldest farmers selling at local markets (he was born on [Bastille Day](#) in 1922) and a colorful character — he often sports a purple velvet pimp hat with faux leopard trim, along with a bolo tie — is selling Garrigus' gojis under a "second certificate" arrangement at the Beverly Hills and Santa Monica Virginia Park markets. These markets don't usually allow such an arrangement, but their managers have admitted Garrigus' gojis because at this time they have no farmers offering their own gojis.

Richard Burkart does have a small goji planting in Dinuba, from which he was hoping to bring fruit to market, but birds, which adore the bright orange berries, have been devouring most of his crop. Garrigus, who had to go to the expense of netting his entire field, started picking a month ago and will harvest fruit through September.

Elberta and Crawford peaches

The very best tasting peach varieties remain little-known today because they usually have defects, such as soft flesh, low production and unattractive appearance, that make them ill-suited for commercial cultivation. As a result, even knowledgeable stone-fruit lovers often consider good or average-flavored older varieties such as Elberta as classics, truly great peaches.

Like most peaches grown today, Elberta descended from Chinese Cling, a variety imported from China in 1850. A seedling of this variety sown in 1870, Elberta was the workhorse of its era, from the late 19th to mid-20th century, because by the standards of the time it was large and productive, and shipped well (although by contemporary standards it is small, poorly colored and soft!); it was also a "cosmopolitan" variety, adapted to many growing areas, from New Hampshire to Texas to California. But as U.P. Hedrick noted in 1917 in "The Peaches of New York, it was "none too high in quality," with a tendency to bitterness unless fully ripe.

The San Joaquin Valley, however, is hot enough to "finish" Elberta and its similar-tasting kin, such as July Elberta (ripe the last two weeks) and Fay Elberta (starting any day now), which are somewhat less astringent; and Art Lange of Reedley, the dean of farmers market stone-fruit growers, is just



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nuts enough to pick them fully ripe. His Fay Elbertas will be sold shortly under the Honey Crisp banner at the Beverly Hills Sunday and Santa Monica Wednesday markets.

There was another type that predated Chinese Cling and its descendants in America, the Crawford family of peaches, which was universally recognized for high flavor and tender, juicy flesh. F.A.



July Elberta peach

(David Karp / For The Times / July 21, 2010)
July Elberta peach grown by Art Lange in Reedley, sold under the Honey Crisp banner by Ron Cornelsen at the Santa Monica farmer's market.

Waugh wrote in 1913 in "The American Peach Orchard: "Their unquestionable high quality makes these varieties favorites of the best customers. Housewives who are in the habit of canning fancy peaches for home use still insist on Crawfords, and rightly object when Elbertas are offered as a substitute."

The varieties of this type, such as Early Crawford, Late Crawford, Admiral Dewey and St. John, were still grown in California as late as the 1950s but have now passed out of cultivation because of their low production.

The unsurpassed Crawford flavor might well have vanished, except from scientific collections, had it not been almost miraculously reincarnated in a selection of unknown ancestry rescued from the reject pile at the UC Davis cling peach breeding program, which became known as Baby Crawford. With deep golden skin and flesh and an intense peachy aroma that can fill a room, this modern freestone variety was adopted and promoted several decades ago by Andy Mariani, a grower in Morgan Hill, near San Jose, and has become a favorite among members

of California Rare Fruit Growers.

Barbara and Bill Spencer of Windrose Farm in Paso Robles have 10 producing trees of Baby Crawford and 50 more on order from Trees of Antiquity, a local nursery; they should have the fruit next Wednesday or the following at the Santa Monica farmers market.

Last Wednesday the Spencers started bringing Peregrine, an exquisite English white peach from 1906, very juicy and richly flavored, and derived, appropriately, from the old Spenser nectarine. They will also soon be selling the Silver Logan white peach, which is large and roundish with firm but melting flesh, intense, balanced flavor and a honey-like aroma — a peach counterpart to the celebrated Snow Queen white nectarine. Such are the varieties worthy of true connoisseurship.

food@latimes.com

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