

FRESH NEWS

ANOTHER SERVICE FROM THE MERCHANTS OF SAN FRANCISCO WHOLESALE PRODUCE MARKET

SAN FRANCISCO

FEBRUARY 22, 2010

FRUITS

GRAPEFRUIT



In the citrus world, the calendar goes like this. January, National Grapefruit Month (sure everybody knows THAT!), March, April, December! Even though February does mark the sell-ebriation of National Grapefruit Month, they have been rolling for a good while and should continue into early spring. The newer varieties out of Florida and Texas come in two colors, red and redder! True, the juice is milder and more flavorful than traditional varieties, but the flesh color is really what attracts attention. To highlight this, slice a few in half and wrap in plastic to showcase this eye catching color. Generous sampling may also win over some folks who still expect the battery-acid-in-a-peel flavor, which is still a common misconception with some shoppers. Grapefruit marries well with salads, especially spinach, and the juice itself makes a great, no-oil dressing. Just chop some raisins into the juice to balance out the flavor. In the words of a famous produce guy, "You can't buy a bad grapefruit!" They really are in fantastic shape currently.

MANDARINS and TANGERINES

Florida's Honey tangerine is rolling along quite well. Smaller sized fruit is also plentiful for the value conscience and fresh squeezed juicers in the crowd. Many a Minneola, the knob-on-the-end specialty citrus. Due to the grapefruit background, it does not quite have the sugar of others. But juicy, yes! The late stem and leaf murcott is a real hit. Although on the quite small side, the rind color is eye-catching, the interior color is a deep burnt orange and the bite is juicy and sweet. Just a good all-round fruit. And if you look close you may even find a royal mandarin or two!

MANGOES



The mango quality from South America has improved dramatically over the recent years. Currently we are experiencing an amazing run of good quality South American fruit. They are mainly Kents out of Peru. This is a very creamy fruit, with zero stringiness. Keitts have been around in a limited way. These are also very creamy, but tend to be larger in size. Mexico will kick in soon with early fruit.

BERRIES

Those heart shaped strawberries out of Oxnard have been coming in big, red and pretty flavorful. Although often coming in with the "white shoulders" most folks don't like to see. We've had some good weather, but with more rain on the way, supply may suffer temporarily. Valentine's Day was a bit rough supply-wise. Hopefully they will recover in time for their promotional fruit role for Easter. The southern hemisphere is supplying us with blueberries, although not in huge quantities. Raspberries also are a bit short. The berry that can be counted on for some supply is the blackberry out of Mexico. Not so lately as these have been short as well.

STONEFRUIT



Probably the best bet right now are the Chilean nectarines. After a bit of softening, they are downright good. They will tend to wrinkle if left to get real soft, but the flavor is fine even medium soft. There are some almost canning looking type peaches. Not much in the way of blush color, but a fine flavor. They are not a cling stone as you would figure for this type of peach. Semi-cling as you can spin both halves apart fairly easily. Look also for Larry Anne plums which have been added to the lineup of summer fruit. As of now they have wheels under them coming to market. Do not wait on this fruit as it is a consistently good eater and seller!

MELONS

This has not been a major place to be for a while, but things are looking better. Much of the fruit is South American, but an increasing supply is coming from closer to home-Mexico. Melons picked closer to their customers are generally picked more mature and thus, sweeter. Currently the honeydew has been muscling up more flavor than has the cantaloupe. The popular "personal sized" watermelons have been short on supply.

ORANGES

The navels are coming along fine as to flavor and price. It is tough to find a bad navel right now. In the juice world, Some Texas Hamlins are around-they of the better exterior, more juice but less color generally.

GRAPES

Not as many Chilean boats landing with grapes have bumped up prices with shorter supply. Flavor has been fine although sizing has been running smaller.

SPECIALTY CITRUS

The curiously honey combed segments of the red navel, Cara Cara variety set this apart from others in this category. Bright colored blood oranges have been getting lots of deserved attention lately. Available both in larger sized and smaller, juice sized fruit.

MORE MEYERS

No citrus set is complete without meyer lemons. They have smoother skins, and a brighter yellow color to boot. They are consistently juicy with a mild but still very flavorful citrus punch. They will do anything a regular lemon does, plus some. It is a perfect cooking lemon whether just squeezed onto fish or used in baking. Thin skinned too. Just a good fruit.

CARA CARA CORNER



And don't let anyone tell you that this has grapefruit in the lineage. It originated in Hacienda de Cara Cara in Valencia, Venezuela and is a cross between two navel oranges. One being the standard Washington variety and the other a Brazilian variety called the Bahia. Although pretty new to most folks, it was first developed about thirty years ago.

ORGANICS



Yes, we have some organic bananas. There exists a loyal and expanding customer base for these fruits. Some samplers rate them as a bit creamier and richer in flavor than their conventional counterparts. Worth a taste, especially as the current price spread is not particularly large due to higher conventional prices. At almost conventional \$\$ levels, organic broccoli is poised to be double lined with conventional. And the special bands can make for few slip ups at the checkout counter. Asparagus from the Imperial Valley is here although with a stiff price tag. Organic Texas red grapefruits have been excellent so far. As their brethren on the conventional side, the navels are in prime form. Cooking greens are making a comeback after being on the slim supply side for a while. Wide assortment of cherry tomatoes are available from San Jose del Cabo. Lots of colors and varieties.

Written by Mark Ferro

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SPECIALTY

Jicama is new crop and looks it. Nice stuff, and with a higher moisture content. Diminutive kumquats add interest to the citrus display, although their supply is somewhat limited. Roll the small fruit between your fingers to blend the sweetness of the skin with the tang of the flesh. Belgium endive, both colors are coming off fresh root stock. Nice color and eating quality.

VEGETABLES

The recent blizzard like weather on the east coast stalls truck shipments there. And if some produce is not quite up to the ride back east, it stays here. What we have now is a basic over-supply in many commodities. Check your lots, talk to your wholesaler and you will find something that suits you fine.

EGGPLANT



Always a favorite during the Lenten season, Mexican supply will fill the meatless bill for a while. Good supplies on both popular sizes 18 and 24 count.

SPINACH

With a commodity that has far more than its share of quality problems over the course of a season, currently it is behaving very well. A nice looking box will not set you back that much.

TOMATOES

Mexican supplies have tightened up some from their recent levels. The Florida freeze has just killed their supply. So between that and the strong Mexican demand, we are looking at stiff prices for this limited supply. Place pacs, cherry tomatoes and romas are all up some and this may last a while.

ARTICHOKES

"Winter kissed" is a term used to describe the discoloration of the outside leaves when cold has damaged the thin layer of skin on the leaf. Lately the 'chokes in the produce departments show signs of this condition. Many consider this artichoke to be richer in flavor and more tender than "non-kissed" chokes. The best is yet to come.

BROCCOLI

A spread in prices and qualities, but mostly, more than affordable.

CAULIFLOWER

Likewise plentiful. Just don't hold your breath, what comes down can always go UP! And vice versa!

PEPPERS

Neither red nor green bells are real plentiful. Even tighter for now on the greens bells. Still many lingering effects, all negative from the Florida freeze.

ONIONS



In yellow and red, plenty to be had. As usual whites are tighter in supply with higher prices. Even some nice "sweets" available out South America.

ASPARAGUS

For right now, enough to be had. Quality is good and prices are pretty reasonable. Mainly Mexican supply, with some coming from California's Imperial Valley. It will still be a ways until our local Stockton asparagus ramps up.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Mark Ferro is an active produce professional who not only writes a weekly newspaper column, but also co-hosts an hour-long radio show about fresh fruits and vegetables. As part of the "Produce Pair" he can be heard Saturdays at noon (PST) on the Talk America Radio Network on over 60 stations coast to coast., including Yada Yada Radio 1550AM here in the Bay Area or listen on the Internet at www.producepair.com.

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