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'Tis the season for exotic mangoes

- by MARGARET CHAN

ENTER, what I call, the gourmet fruit importers.

These are businessmen who specialise in importing exotic fruits and they give personal attention to ensuring the quality of the products they sell.

The fruits that they import are bought direct from orchards abroad and are of the best possible quality. The customer pays more for the quality he gets.

One of these fruit importers, **Dabzee Enterprise** run by Mr and Mrs Bokhari, specialise in Pakistani mangoes brought in between June and August.

From their office in Karachi, the Bokharis buy mangoes from orchards in Pakistan. The mangoes are professionally graded, and packed in specially-made corrugated cardboard cartons before they are air-flown into Singapore.

Riper

The mangoes come with instructions on how to store and eat the fruit and their ripening dates.

Gourmet fruit importers buy direct from orchards. The fruits are usually picked when they are riper, which makes a great difference in taste. And the importers have stringent quality control checks at source.

The Bokharis bring in three varieties of Pakistani mangoes: the Sindhri, Chounsa (they pronounce it with a silent "n") and Fajri. The Sindhri mangoes are the most impressive looking. The long, large and orangey-yellow skinned mangoes weigh between 250g to 1kg each. They are fleshy, very juicy, and have little fibre. This variety is sweet, but not intensely so, and has a flowery fragrance. They are in season around June.

Fajri mangoes come from mid-June to mid-August. They are round, plump, and pale green. When ripened they are light yellow near the stem.

Fajri mangoes are the sweetest of the three varieties but are less fragrant than the Sindhri. Fajri's have fibres close to the skin, are generally smaller than Sindhri mangoes and weigh between 250g and 600g.

Chounsa mangoes are in season from the end of June till the end of August. These are smaller, oval-shaped, with yellow-green skin and very creamy flesh. The Chounsa weighs from 250g to 400g each.

The Bokharis say that mangoes should be wrapped in tissue paper and ripened in a warm, open place.

A slightly soft fruit is fully ripened and it is sweetest when the skin is slightly wrinkled.

Ripened fruit should be kept at room temperature and only chilled in the refrigerator

a few hours before eating. Prolonged storage in a cold place robs the fruit of its fragrance.

The mangoes are sold in 4kg cartons for \$22, or in 2kg mini packs of styrofoam trays wrapped in cling plastic. About four to five mangoes weigh 2 kg.

I found these good value for money compared to the barely 200g Philippino mangoes which cost about \$1.60 each in the market. Twenty such mangoes (weighing 4kg) would have cost me \$32, and as Mr Bokhari pointed out, there would have been 20 lots of skin and seeds to throw away. The Pakistani mangoes I think, also have a plus point when it comes to taste.

Delivery

Because the Bokharis import smaller quantities (about 10 tonnes during each season), they insist that the mangoes are sold at a fixed price instead of at a more significant mark-up as is often the case with some retailers.