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Sweet and succulent mangoes that grow on you

- by VIOLET OON

"O J BEST Quality Fresh Mangoes Airflown from Pakistan," reads the advertisement in the newspaper.

"Eighteen dollars per carton of 4kg," it continued.

What caught my eye most was the promise of delivery with charges fixed at 50 cents for the city area and \$1 for areas outside the city.

So, like many other Singaporeans, I phoned the company and placed my order, only to be told that I had to wait for next week's shipment as the company, Dabzee Enterprise, was overwhelmed with orders.

The voice at the other end was very polite. When I said I wanted to interview them, the spokesman for the company, Mr Bokhari, 35, himself delivered the carton of mangoes.

He also brought his own carton, a knife and a plate to let me taste a slice of the fruit.

He goes round town introducing his mangoes to potential clients this way.

But why the personal delivery? Why not supply to retailers?

He said: "First, it is not cheap to fly the mangoes to Singapore. There is also much red tape in Pakistan. All these add to the cost.

"I thought that if I could supply them at \$18 per carton to retailers, why shouldn't I offer the same price direct to customers, plus a small delivery charge?"

"I also want to make sure that everyone gets to taste the mangoes at their peak. The only way to do this is to control the distribution; retailers may offer mangoes which are already mottled or overripe."

He added: "We allow our customers to inspect each mango and if by chance one is rotten, we will replace it."

You're assured of about 4kg a carton and depending on the sizes, this can mean anything between eight or 12 mangoes.

Mr Bokhari's involvement with his product goes to the extent of printing a list of instructions regarding the mangoes. The list is pasted on the inside of the carton.

Stamped on the outside is the date when the fruit will ripen.

Mr Bokhari used to work for Pakistan International Airlines. When he came to Singapore he realized that there were few imports from Pakistan and that Singapore's fruit loving population would accept Pakistani mangoes.

"But people in Pakistan are not export oriented," he said.

Also, there are no modern packing facilities. I

have the boxes manufactured in Singapore and sent over to Pakistan.”

The idea of importing mangoes into Singapore had occurred to him years ago, but it was only last year that he managed to solve the bureaucratic problems.

“The farmers in Pakistan are still very primitive and there is nothing like modern advanced fertilisers and accelerated growth of fruits.”

Quality control is also not present and that’s why we set up our own office in Karachi to purchase the mangoes from them.

For every tonne we import to Singapore, we have to buy two tonnes from the farmers.

“Our office there selects the mangoes for Singapore stringently and the rest are sold in the markets in Karachi.”

That’s why some customers have to be put on the waiting list, he said.

“We are also setting up a few distribution centres to make our delivery service more efficient,” he said.

In season at present are India’s famous Alphonso mangoes which are sweet.

Also available are mangoes from the Philippines.

There are other Indian mangoes tastier than the Alphonso. The Pakistani kind loses out to the Alphonso in intensity of flavour, but then it has a different taste altogether which is delicious in its own way.

As advised you should eat it only when the skin crinkles, because then it becomes very sweet.

The flesh is less fibrous than the Alphonso and smoother. It is cheaper too.

The variety on the market now is called the Sindhri and comes from Sind.

Next month, another variety, Chousa, also from Pakistan, will arrive.

The Pakistani mango season ends with the Fajri from Punjab. This will be the sweetest. It does not turn yellow.