

Yuppie demand for rare tropical fruits rises

AP — To make a "Stardini," mix a dash of Florida star fruit juice, a splash of vermouth and 1/4 ounces of vodka.

The drink is named for one of a half dozen tropical fruits newly marketed by South Florida growers, who believe longings of health conscious yuppies will launch a national love affair with such rare crops as star fruit (carambola), mamey sapote, atemoyas, sugar apples, monstera and low-calorie longans and lychees.

The yearnings of young professionals for new and better foods have created a market for offbeat edibles that Florida growers and shippers want to fill.

"We are gambling that a good deal of these are going to hit and become staple items. And I think they will," said Bill Schaefer, marketing director for national fruit and vegetable shipper J.R. Brooks & Son, Inc. "We are responding to the 1980s call of 'What do you have that's new and different?'" said Schaefer, who in 1983 shipped only mangoes, limes and avocados.

The rare tropical fruits constituted about 5 percent of Brooks' \$35 million in gross sales last year, he said.

Growers admit there are problems. Some fruits have short shelf lives or don't ship well. Plus, with supply lagging behind demand, one piece of fruit may cost several dollars, leading rank-and-file shoppers to pass it by.

"They're yuppie fruits," said Marc Ellenby, owner of the Comfort Grove. "And we're it. South Florida is the

only place in the continental U.S. where you can grow tropical fruits," said Ellenby, who also works at Brooks. "It's a very exciting time for tropical fruit growers in South Florida."

Peggy Kenney's fledgling Miami fruit distribution firm, sells no bananas but ships rare fruits to restaurants and grocers in New York, Texas and Colorado.

"The demand is good," she said. "It's the gourmets."

About 10 years ago, California kiwis languished on shelves. Then the price came down and kiwis are selling like hotcakes now, said Max Nilsson, co-owner of Fresh World, an Atlanta specialty foods distributor who does a lot of business with South Florida growers.

Schaefer thinks tastes are changing and the new South Florida crops may achieve the popularity of the kiwi. The specialty food market started about a dozen years ago. Growers wanted new crops, grocers wanted new produce and consumers wanted a change, Schaefer and Nilsson said.

"Why? Boredom with run of the mill. Increased disposable income for the yuppies and better marketing," said Murray Corman, president of the Rare Fruit Council International, Inc., a Miami-based study group.

"Compare these with fruits popularized in recent history. Kiwi, a mediocre fruit, or cranberry, basically a terrible fruit," said Corman, who sells trees for a living. "Why not something that melts in your mouth?"

Dade County growers say their business sense tells them to plant rare fruits and keep pace with the trend, agriculture agent Mary Lambert said.

Agriculture is big business here. Vegetables brought in \$180 million in 1984-85, the most current year for which statistics are available from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Growers in Dade County earned \$44.39 million from their 22,240 acres of fruit that year.

Avocados brought in \$12.5 million, limes \$19.9 million, and mangoes, a peach-like fruit, brought \$5.6 million. Other top sellers were papayas, bananas, lychees, carambola and mamey sapote, a custardy fruit that comes in two flavors. Carambolas, which when sliced fall into five-pointed stars, were listed separately for the first time in new statistics because their production had increased.

"They've caught on. Carambolas are sexy. You open them up and they're pretty," Lambert said.

Growers are excited.

"Business is wonderful. People are anxious to try new food," said Joan Green, the owner of Green's Gourmet Grove. The 5-year-old business this year should ship out some 70,000 pounds of carambola, plus longans, a lychee relative, and atemoyas, a pudding-sweet pulpy hybrid of sugar apples favored by Hispanics.

A Nisson of Fresh World of Atlanta, which markets specialty foods to restaurants and grocers in 14

Southeastern states, agrees that rare fruit sales have surged and have a future. But his enthusiasm doesn't match growers'.

"The yuppie generation is part of the food renaissance in the United States. It was yuppie initiated, but it's for everybody," he said. "Carambola is wonderful. But it's not for everybody."

Fruit expert Corman disagreed. "With proper marketing it's going to be a boon for South Florida," he said.

Schaefer of Brooks, founded in 1920 as a distributor of Cuban avocados, thinks proper marketing and advertising will create a niche for rare tropical fruits. And crops planted this year mean lower prices in a few seasons, he added.

"The market for tropicals is everywhere. Consumers will buy without having the first bit of information about what it is," he said, remembering a Pittsburgh woman who called to ask him what to do with the carambola she just bought. Her call led to Brooks sponsoring a carambola recipe contest. "We tested them and had horrible results."

Brooks' chefs slowly realized some recipes were for tart and others for sweet star fruits, but that people didn't know the difference and hadn't specified which to use in their recipes. Brooks now includes fruit information and recipes with each box they ship.

Apple streusel coffee cake is a fancy breakfast treat

AP — Voilà! Spley apple filling and a crumb topping transform white yeast bread dough into a fancy breakfast or brunch bread.

For the filling, choose a tart apple that holds its shape well when cooked, such as Jonathan, Granny Smith or Winesap. A medium-sized apple makes about 1/2 cup of chopped apple.

Cinnamon; sprinkle over apples. Cutting toward filling, make 1/2-inch-long cuts in dough at 1-inch intervals on both sides of apples. Fold strips alternately over apples. Fold under ends of loaf. Place leaves on a greased 15x10x1-inch baking pan. Brush with melted butter. Stir together flour and granulated sugar. Cut in the 1/2 cup margarine until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.

Sprinkle half the crumb mixture over each loaf; top with almonds, if desired. Cover; let rise until nearly double (45-60 minutes). Bake in a 350° F oven 30 minutes or until brown. Serve warm. Makes 2 coffee breads, 24 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 96 calories, 2 g protein, 16 g carbohydrate, 3 g fat, 1 mg cholesterol, 115 mg sodium.

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2 tbs. margarine or butter, softened
1 1/2 cups finely chopped peeled apples
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tbs. margarine or butter, melted
2 tbs. all-purpose flour
2 tbs. granulated sugar
1 tbs. margarine or butter, optional
1/2 cup silvered almonds, optional

Thaw dough according to package directions. Divide dough in half; let rest 10 minutes. On floured surface roll each dough half into a 8-inch square. Spread each with half the softened butter. Arrange half the apples down the center of each dough square. Combine brown sugar and

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Spicy dish combines Mexican, Italian

AP — The two ethnic cooking styles American families like best are Italian and Mexican.

That should make a sure winner of this dish combining flavors from each cuisine. The easy filling is similar to that of lasagna, but it's rolled in tortillas like an enchilada.

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TORTILLA ROLL-UPS

1 1/2 lbs. bulk Italian sausage
2 cups cream-style cottage cheese
2 tbs. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. dried oregano, crushed
1 tsp. dried basil, crushed
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
3 cups bottled spaghetti sauce
10 large whole wheat or white flour tortillas
1 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese

In skillet cook sausage until browned; drain off fat. Stir in cottage cheese and flour. Add oregano, basil and garlic powder to the spaghetti sauce. Stir 1/2 cup of the spaghetti sauce into sausage mixture. Spoon about 1/4 cup meat mixture onto each tortilla; roll up jelly-roll style. Place tortillas, seam side down, in a 13x20-inch baking pan. Pour remaining spaghetti sauce over tortillas. Bake, covered, in a 375° F oven for 35-40 minutes. Uncover; sprinkle mozzarella cheese on top. Bake for 3 minutes or until cheese melts. Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 406 calories, 26 g protein, 35 g carbohydrate, 18 g fat, 47 mg cholesterol, 1339 mg sodium.

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