

Local

The Jewels of the Desert:

pomegranates



S



Pomegranate trees are shrub-like with multiple trunks that twist as they grow to 6 to 12 feet tall. It takes about 5 years for a pomegranate tree to consistently produce quality fruit, but they can live up to 200 years! Pomegranate fruits are typically in season beginning late August through January. Turn the page to learn more!

Local



Lucky for us, California has the ideal microclimate to grow them. At the lower end of the San Joaquin Valley you'll find a desert that has become home to pomegranate orchards. One grower, David White of Trinity Fruit, has been growing pomegranates there for 17 years.

"We grow and distribute whole pomegranates as well as fresh JuicyGems arils to Raley's, Bel Air and Nob Hill stores," says David.

The second largest grower of pomegranates in the country, Trinity Fruit also produces stone fruits like peaches, nectarines and plums in the summer and Asian pears and mandarins in the fall. Their main varieties of pomegranates include Early Wonderful, Wonderful and Aco, an Israeli type that's exclusively grown in North America by Trinity Fruit.

If you visit the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley late in the year, you might stumble across acres of medium-sized trees adorned with shiny red orbs. If you plucked one of them and broke it open, inside you'd find hundreds of deep red jewel-like "arils," each containing a seed and a burst of juice.

Although pomegranates are relatively new to the U.S., they've been cultivated and revered for thousands of years in the Middle East and along the Mediterranean. They love hot, dry growing seasons and cool winters.



Top: David White has grown pomegranates for 17 years in the San Joaquin Valley.

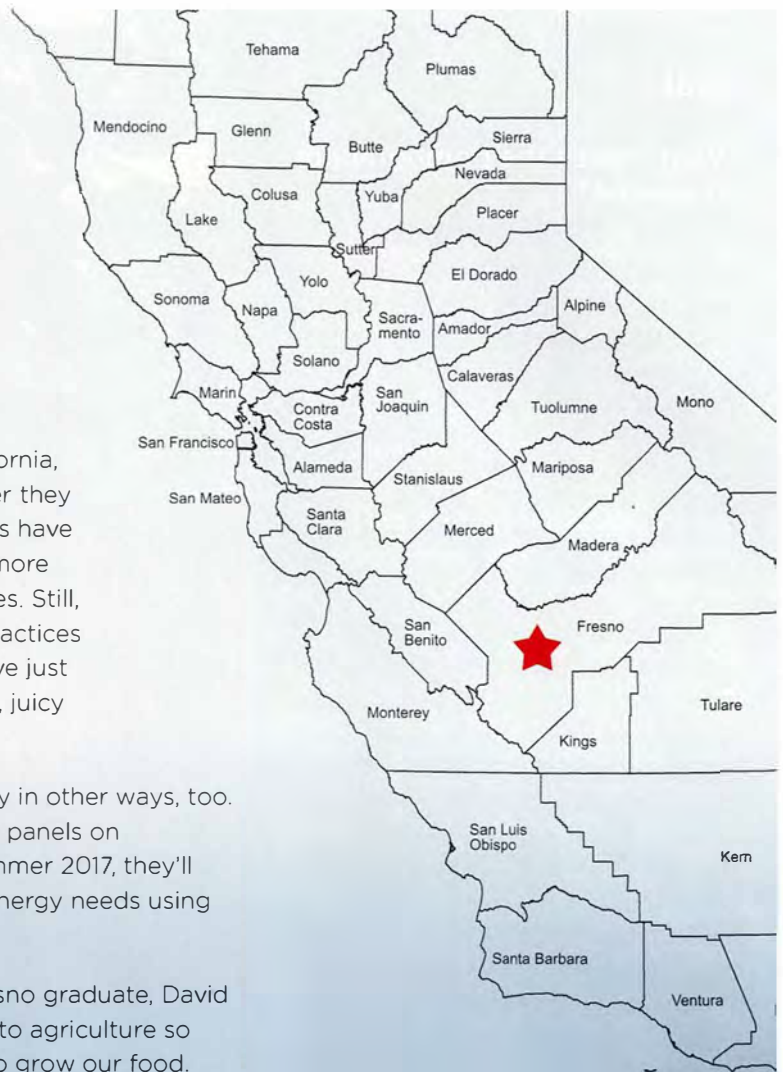


...pomegranate trees are more drought tolerant than most other fruit trees...

With the last few years of drought in California, it's a challenge for farmers to get the water they need for their crops. Pomegranate growers have a slight advantage because the trees are more drought-tolerant than most other fruit trees. Still, they do need irrigation and Trinity Fruit practices water recycling to ensure their trees receive just what they need to produce eye-appealing, juicy red pomegranates.

Trinity Fruit is moving toward sustainability in other ways, too. They've already installed 9½ acres of solar panels on one of their fruit processing sheds. By summer 2017, they'll reach their goal of meeting 50% of their energy needs using solar power!

As a proud California State University-Fresno graduate, David is dedicated to introducing young people to agriculture so the next generation has enough farmers to grow our food. "We offer internships to students from Fresno State and other local schools to teach them about the importance of agriculture and sustainability," says David.



Local

What makes the pomegranate so special?

First, the abundance of arils, the little red jewels hidden inside the fruit, have long been associated with fertility and prosperity.

Because the uncut fruits can last a month outside the refrigerator, you'll often see them used in harvest decorations. But more than just an attractive dining table centerpiece, pomegranates are nutrition stars, too.

Poms provide essential nutrients like potassium and vitamins C and K,⁽¹⁾ as well as phytochemicals that may help promote longevity.⁽²⁾ They also have dietary fiber that may regulate the digestive tract and help manage energy levels.

How do you choose the best pomegranate? "Hold a pomegranate in each hand and go with the heavier one – it has more sugar and juice," says David.

Look for a deep red outer rind, but smaller brown blemishes are normal because the tree's thorns may scratch the fruit – it doesn't affect the quality of the arils inside. Choose a firm fruit with tough skin and no soft spots.

Pomegranates will last up to two months in the fridge. You can separate the arils from the rind (see our instructions on page 27) and keep in the fridge for five days or in the freezer for three months.

(1) USDA Food Composition Databases, <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/search/list>

(2) Phytochemicals: The Cancer Fighters in the Foods We Eat, http://www.aicr.org/reduce-your-cancer-risk/diet/elements_phytochemicals.html



Pomegranates are so unique that they have no close relatives in the fruit world. The word "pomegranate" stems from the medieval Latin pomom granatum, or "seeded apple." The French name for the fruit, grenade, was later used to name the small hand bombs that soldiers throw in battle.

HOW TO:

Seeding a pomegranate

If you're pressed for time, you can find already-separated fresh pomegranate arils in our Produce Dept. But if you want to try your hand at harvesting your own arils, here's an easy way to do it without getting juice stains on your clothes. (Although this technique reduces mess, we recommend you wear an apron or old shirt while handling pomegranate arils!)



1. Slice off a small part of the top and bottom of the pom. Then make four slices down the sides of the pomegranate.



2. Pull the slices apart. Inside you'll find the white membrane with hundreds of little red jewels inside.



3. Take one slice and submerge it in a bowl of cold water, using your fingers to separate sections of arils from the membrane. The membrane will float while the arils sink to the bottom of the bowl.



4. Discard the membrane and scoop the arils from the bowl, then pat dry. You can eat right away, store in an airtight container and refrigerate for up to five days or freeze for up to three months.

Tip: There are endless ways to enjoy fresh pomegranate arils. Sprinkle them over cereal, yogurt, granola, toast with peanut butter, green salad or fruit salad. Or serve them on a cheese board with soft cheeses like goat cheese or feta.

Tip: To freeze, place arils in a single layer on a wax paper-lined baking sheet and freeze for at least two hours, then store in an airtight container in the freezer.