

South African kumquats fill gap in stable European market

South African kumquats, which are exported to Europe from May to November, are grown in Limpopo Province.



Photos supplied by Premier Fruit Exports

Kumquats are eaten whole, as the rind contains the essential oils that impart its flavour. This means that the kumquat is classified differently by the EU Commission to other citrus, regarding maximum residue levels. For this reason, kumquats don't receive the usual post-harvest treatment of fungicide baths and wax, but are only treated with sanitising salts.

Between 200,000 and 230,000 2kg cartons are sent from South Africa to fill the gap in the European market when kumquats from Spain and Israel are not available.

South African kumquats face stiff competition from the abundance of berries and stonefruit during the European summer months.

Stephen Beghin, director of Premier Fruit Exports, says that there is a slight growth in demand due to increased awareness of the health benefits of kumquats. These benefits include the kumquat's ability to improve the immune system, regulate the digestive system, lower cholesterol levels and boost the health of skin, teeth, eyes and hair. Due to the sweet taste in the rind, kumquats can be used as a garnish, in cocktails and made into preserves, jellies and desserts.

Once kumquats are turned into a jam or a sauce, they go exceptionally well with vanilla ice cream or as a filling in vanilla cake. "The flavour comes from the essential oils in the rind," he adds, "and it's very healthy – I recommend you pop two in your mouth after breakfast each morning. It also goes really well with gin, although perhaps not straight after breakfast!"

For making a marmalade, he advises a cooking time of merely 30 minutes, with a modest amount of brown sugar, and equal proportions of kumquats (cut into quarters and deseeded) and water.

Beghin mentions that there is a very long culinary tradition around kumquats in the Far East. "Kumquats are native to the Asia-Pacific region, where they have been grown for thousands of years. It is an important ingredient in Asian cuisine between November and February."



However, kumquats are prone to damage by cold steri treatment and therefore cannot be exported from South Africa to the Far East.

Domestically, there are also modest volumes and modest demand. According to Elfranco Hoogenhout of Farmer's Trust market agency at the Tshwane fresh market: "We receive about a pallet every second week from Limpopo Province. If it's there, people ask for it, but if not, there's not much of a demand. People buy it for making preserves."

Premier Fruit Exports specialises in high-value exotic fruit, such as kumquats, litchis and avocados.

For more information:

Stephen Beghin

Premier Fruit Exports

Tel: +27 31 767 3875

Email: stephen@pfe.co.za



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Author: Carolize Jansen

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