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Exotic fruit can be eaten plain or used in various dishes



MARY ELLEN WRIGHT | Staff Writer Jul 26, 2017



You can find these unusual fruits in your local supermarket. Clockwise from upper left, they are dragon fruit, horned melon (kiwano), pepino melon and star fruit.

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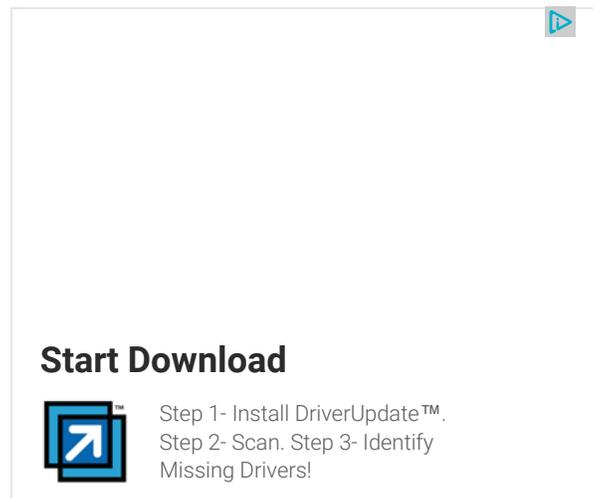
MARY ELLEN WRIGHT | Staff

Tropical fruit has long been found in Asian and Latino grocery stores and other

markets specializing in international foods.

But over the past few years, some funky-looking fruit has found its way into conventional grocery stores around Lancaster County.

Unusual-looking foods such as dragon fruit, rambutans, horned melons, star fruit and cape gooseberries can be found in colorful displays.



Sure, they look beautiful and exotic. But what can you do with them?

For foods like fuzzy rambutans — and their botanical cousins, lychees and longans — you can cut open their outer skins, remove the central pit and pop the remaining white ball of flesh into your mouth as a sweet snack or dessert.

That’s how Lynn Sarak, an employee of the Asian Market at 248 E Liberty St., says she has always eaten them — here, and in her native Cambodia.

Vy Banh, one of the owners of Vietnamese restaurants Rice & Noodles on Lititz Pike and Sprout on South Prince Street, says these tropical fruits find their way into dishes and beverages at the restaurants.

“We make a tropical fruit cocktail ... that’s a mix between a dessert and a drink,” she says. It features fruits such as lychee and longan.

“We make a simple syrup with sugar and pandan leaves (from a tropical plant) and we mix it with coconut milk and ice.

“It’s very refreshing,” she says, “and perfect for this time of year.”

Banh says sliced star fruit can be used in spring rolls.

“We also use it to make our fish soup for two,” she says, a sour soup called ganh canh chua.

She also uses passion fruit in one of the varieties of French macaron cookies she makes, adding a chocolate ganache in the middle.

Banh says she also makes a simple passion fruit juice with sugar and water.

Passion fruit can also be used in salads, jams and preserves, says chef Timothy Harris, an instructor at the Pennsylvania School for Culinary Arts.

But its sweet and tangy taste also makes it work well in a chutney “that can be sweet and tangy, or it can be tart.”

The white flesh of rambutans, lychees and longans can be used in sweet-and-sour cooking, Harris says, once you’ve removed the fruit pits.

Those three fruits are often used in seafood cooking, he adds.

Harris says star fruit juice is good for making sauces, sorbets and ice cream.

“It also makes a great curd, just like any citrus curd,” he says.

Harris says he teaches his students to compress watermelon in a Cryovac food sealer to intensify the flavor. He hopes to try the same technique in the coming year with dragon fruit.

Harris recommends that home cooks take a chance on some of these unusual tropical fruits.

“With any of these, you have to live a little bit risky,” Harris says. “Buy it, try it and experiment.”



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