

Pitahaya

A market with a future

Also called Belle of the Night (Fruit du Dragon or Raquette Tortue in French and Pitaya in Spanish), pitahaya, a member of the Cactaceae family, is now a full member of the 'small exotic fruits' retail category.

General

The origin of the pitahaya is not known with any accuracy. Nevertheless it probably comes from the part of Latin America lying between Mexico and Colombia. Its botanical name, *Hylocereus*, refers to both its habitat (*hulos* means 'forest' in Greek) and the way in which it resists drought (the wax or *cereus* covering the leaves). Indeed, pitahaya can withstand temperatures of 38/40°C but nevertheless requires 600 to 1 300 mm annual rainfall.

The plant is a member of the cactus family and consists of creeping stems 6 to 12 metres long. The fruits are oblong and covered with foliaceous scales and contain pulp with a scattering of black seeds.

Varieties

Some fifteen varieties of pitahaya exist but only two main types are sold in Europe.

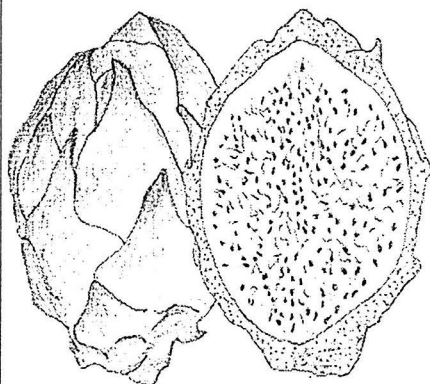
Pink or red pitahaya

There are two subtypes:

- a red-fleshed variety (*Hylocereus purpusii*): the fruit has an average diameter of 100 mm and is scattered with darkish wine-red foliaceous scales. The pulp is abundant and sweet and a characteristic wine-red colour;
- a white-fleshed variety (*Hylocereus undatus*): its white pulp contrasts with the preceding variety and the foliaceous scales are pinkish red.

Yellow pitahaya (*Selenicereus megalanthus*)

The fruit is distinctly smaller than the red and pink species (average weight



180 to 250 g). It also has spines before maturity. The pulp is white and is scattered with black seeds. It has a sweet, very delicate flavour.

The European market

Still practically unknown in the mid-1990s, pitahaya is now a full member of the 'small exotic fruits' category in shops.

No statistics are available for imports of **yellow pitahaya**. Nevertheless, the high cost of production in Colombia—the only origin supplying significant quantities—seems to have had a marked negative effect on shipments in recent seasons.

In contrast, it is easier to observe the market for the red variety. The quantities of **red pitahaya** imported to the EU have increased strongly and steadily in recent years, increasing more than tenfold from 1995 to 2000! The

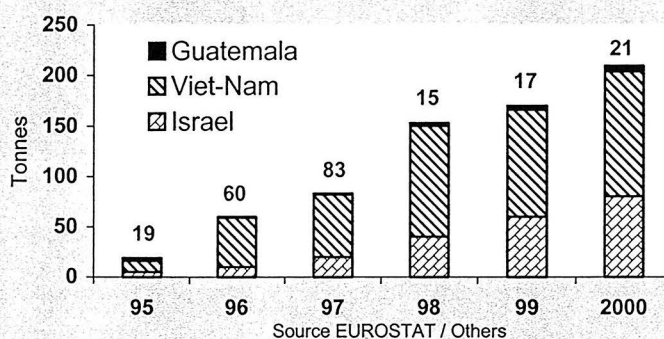
amounts are nevertheless marginal, with 200 tonnes imported in 2000.

Vietnam and Israel share the market, and a few extra batches arrive from Guatemala. The recent developments in Vietnamese production lead to considering that shipments from this source will increase.

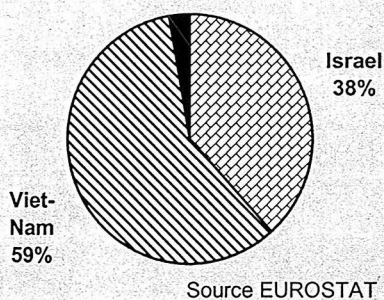
Prices are fairly regular throughout the year. They generally vary from between FrF55 and 70 per package for yellow pitahaya (import stage) and FrF35 and 45 per package for the others.

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Red pitahaya — EU import quantities



Red pitahaya — EU — Market shares in 2000



Calendar of supply by origin

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Packing
Yellow pitahaya													
Colombia													3 kg
Red pitahaya													
Vietnam													4 to 5 kg
Israel													4 kg
Guatemala, Nicaragua													Misc.
Limited arrivals													
Peak arrivals													