

Mad about the mango



This month's ban on succulent **Indian mangoes** has caused uproar. *Emma Sturgess* asks whether there's an alternative

If you've ever sucked the skin of a fragrant Alphonso, you'll know there's a heavenly alternative to the tough flesh of a supermarket mango.

Heartbreakingly for aficionados, it's the really special ones – Indian varieties such as Alphonso, which are velvety and headily aromatic – that are, for this year's short season at least, out of reach.

The EU banned Indian mangoes on May 1 after some batches were contaminated by pests. The ban has upset a lot of people, with importers arguing the fruit can be effectively heat-treated.

Labour MP Keith Vaz recently delivered a box of princely Alphonsoes to David Cameron and urged Parliament to put pressure on the EU to bring them back. Britain imports about £6.3million worth of Indian mangoes a year, so for growers, exporters and wholesalers – and British shopkeepers – the effect could be devastating.

Broadcasters Krishnan Gurmurthy and Kirstie Allsopp are among the high-profile mango devotees who have expressed dismay. So in the midst of the despair, is there any substitute for this most prized of tropical fruits?

The short answer, says food writer Jenny Linford, is probably not. The author of *Food Lovers' London*, she's often to be found schlepping boxes of Indian mangoes – bought in Tooting in south London – home on the Northern line. She's loved them



Disappearing delicacy: Indian mangoes are considered the best but imports have been banned by the EU

since growing up in the tropics and treasures a family photograph of her as a child in Ghana, standing gleefully by a pile of fruit.

'There's a massive contrast between the joyless, rock-hard mangoes you get in supermarkets and Indian mangoes, which have a lovely scent and are so voluptuous and yielding,' she says.

'Mango is really interesting as a flavour; it's sweet but complex, with a piney note. There are hundreds of cultivars out there. Thai mangoes are beautiful but much more delicate – but wherever they're grown, they're a treat.'

Suzanne and Michelle Rousseau (pictured left), authors of *Caribbean Potluck*, agree, pointing out that plenty of fabulous mangoes grow on the islands.

'In Jamaica, we have all kinds of mangoes and each tastes different,' says Suzanne. 'The king is the Bombay mango, which is precious. It's very sweet but has a slight tartness and silky flesh that is firm, not mushy. Then there are Julie, Nelson, East Indian, Blackie, Sweetie, Number 11, Hayden... we'd be devastated if we couldn't get them. Mango time is a very serious time for us.'

Linford says that, for as long as the ban lasts, she'll be scanning exotic fruit emporia for new mangoes – and cracking open the occa-

sional tin of Alphonso purée, which, though very sweet, works in sauces and smoothies. 'If you can only get hard supermarket mangoes, the consensus among experts is that the best way to eat them is in a salad. But what hope is there for another taste of seductive Indian fruit?'

Monica Bhandari of importer Fruity Fresh says sadly: 'They're gone. But if the government can put pressure on the EU by the end of May, we could get the back end of the season. And in July, we'll be getting mangoes from Pakistan. They're the closest to Indian mangoes, pulpy and non-fibrous, but some people who buy Alphonsoes won't touch them because they're not the same.'

Come July, though, they just might be desperate enough to consider it.

KNOW YOUR TROPICAL FRUIT



PINK GUAVA

Green outside, pink inside, these lycopene-rich fruits are a cut above the bog-standard variety and can fill a room with their fragrance.



MANGOSTEEN

Sweet, tangy and fleshy, these look like a bit like a botoxed passion fruit. The flesh is reminiscent of a solid lychee and used in Thai desserts.



RAMBUTAN

Related to the lychee, these pink, hairy berries have a translucent flesh and grapey flavour in a spiny outer casing. Once cooked, the seeds are edible.



YELLOW PASSION FRUIT

With paler pulp and a looser texture than conventional passion fruit, these are also less sour, and popular for their slurpability factor.

