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From kumquats to lime caviar: UK foodies embrace a whole new world of citrus

Chefs, home cooks and supermarkets are discovering exciting new varieties that come in all shapes and sizes



📷 Bergamot, one of the more unusual fruits finding favour in the UK. Photograph: Nuttapong Wongcheronkit/Alamy

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When life gives you pithy [cedro lemons](#) and sweet [Tacle mandarins](#), what exactly do you make with them?

British chefs and home cooks are increasingly embracing new and unusual varieties of citrus in recipes, with supermarkets and greengrocers offering a rising number of speciality fruits. Retailers like M&S now offer punnets of kumquats, while Waitrose has reported a 27% rise in sales of [yuzu](#) juice.

Riverford, which offers boxes of organic produce for home delivery, has noticed a similar trend. The company has seen steady sales of kumquats, with sub-varieties and hybrids like Tacle mandarins (a cross between a clementine and a Tarocco orange) and Ruby Valencias (which have the sweetness of orange but the flavour of grapefruit) performing especially well.

“It’s generally unknown just how much variety there is in shape, size, flavour, and use of citrus,” said Dale Robinson at Riverford. “When consumers see that, they want to try it.”

Emilie Wolfman, trend innovation manager at Waitrose, said unusual types of citrus were seeing a boom in popularity and the supermarket has seen an increase in recipe searches for premium fruits like Sorrento lemons, blood oranges and red grapefruit. “Chefs and home cooks alike are embracing its year-round versatility,” she said.

As ever, restaurants have led the charge, with chefs using slices of cedro lemon, squeezes of **kalamansi**, and pearls of lime caviar in savoury and sweet dishes across the UK.



📷 A fruit sculpture celebrates the 90th Lemon festival in Menton, France, last year. Photograph: Sébastien Nogier/EPA

“These citrus varieties bring a whole new vocabulary of taste,” said chef Mauro Colagreco, whose restaurant at the OWO in Raffles hotel, London, recently gained a Michelin star. Bergamot and makrut (commonly known as kaffir) lime are used to flavour broths, and the zest of Buddha’s hand (a variety with finger-like segments) and yuzu are grated over everything from raw fish to meringue-based desserts.

Colagreco has brought his passion for citrus diversity from his 130-variety garden in Menton, a town in the French Riviera, where his three-Michelin star restaurant, Mirazur, is located.

“I believe British chefs are more than ready for a citrus revolution,” he said. “In fact, I think it has already begun.”

Tom and Matilda Tsappis, the husband-and-wife team behind Killiecrankie House in Perthshire, Scotland, use different citrus fruits depending on the season. “In winter, we showcase Japanese varieties like yuzu, sudachi, and mikan,” said Matilda. “We use yuzu in a turbot beurre blanc and Ecclefechan tart to balance the sweetness. We also turn yuzu peels into a punchy miso condiment for fatty meats and fish.”

Shrub, a UK fruit and vegetable wholesaler established in 2020, has partnered with Todolí Citrus Foundation, a research centre in Valencia. Shrub is now handling the logistics and distribution of Todolí’s unique citrus fruits to consumers in London and the south-east.



📷 Southeast Asian citrus varieties include the kumquat. Photograph: BIOSPHOTO/Alamy

The foundation works as a living seed bank, focused on preserving the biodiversity, history and culture of rare citrus fruits. “It’s rare to be given a brand new set of ingredients to work with and this is incredibly exciting for UK cuisine,” said co-founder Harry Dyer. In addition to supplying restaurants, a 3kg mixed Todolí citrus box has been made available to home chefs.

Cornish Citrus at Curgurrell Farm is now commercially producing Meyer lemons and limes in the UK, using unheated glass and polythene, resulting in virtually carbon-free citrus. One chef who has taken notice is Andy Beynon of the Michelin-starred Behind in London Fields, who is incorporating in-season Tahiti and makrut limes into his kitchen. “I grate them straight into dressings for a clean hit of acidity,” he said.

Colagreco’s research and development team at Mirazur discovered that mandarins arrived in Europe via England in 1805, when two varieties were introduced at London’s Kew Gardens, before spreading to the Mediterranean by 1850. Mediterranean citrus culture is therefore “a heritage that we owe to the English”, Colagreco said.

“The citrus revolution isn’t just about flavour. It’s about connection to nature, cultural exchange, and rethinking what freshness can mean.

“British chefs are not only ready - they’re helping to lead this movement.”