

# YOUR NEW SQUEEZE

Tangy and fragrant yuzu fruits are like nothing you’ve ever tasted, according to the growing number of fans of the citrus superfood. **CLARE HARGREAVES** finds out why chefs can’t get enough of its complex flavour – and how home cooks can make the most of it

What did you find at the foot of your Christmas stocking this year? I’ll bet it was a tangerine borrowed from the family fruit bowl. But if you were lucky, Father Christmas may have decided to impress by popping in something a bit classier: a yuzu.

A what? Until recently, yuzu was for most of us a high-scoring scrabble word handy for using up that ‘y’ or ‘z’, and for chefs and bartenders a tightly kept secret. Now, this versatile Asian citrus fruit is enrapturing British chefs and diners, who can’t get enough of it. Across the country, chefs are grating its zest on to fish, using its juice to marinade scallops, and mingling juice and zest in sorbets, panna cottas and tarts. And home cooks are clamouring for it, too.

Don’t be put off by its unglamorous appearance: on the outside like a knobbly mandarin or

grapefruit, on the inside a pip-heavy lemon. Its tangy yet floral taste – with hints of grapefruit, lemon and mandarin – is, most agree, sublime. “Yuzu is unique in that it’s citrusy but also perfumed. Its aroma is almost like orange blossom,” says yuzu fan James Wilkins, Michelin-starred chef-patron of Wilks in Bristol. “There’s no western equivalent. Its complex flavour is unlike anything you’ve ever tasted.” Better still, yuzu is fantastically nutritious, boasting three times more vitamin C than a lemon and a wealth of health-giving antioxidants. There’s little not to love, it seems, about this citrusy superfood.

Wilkins first met yuzu when heading up French chef Michel Bras’ three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Hokkaido in Japan, where he developed a yuzu and mandarin version of Bras’ signature chocolate biscuit coulant (biscuit with runny fill-

ing). In Japan, yuzu is used fairly widely, its finely grated zest popped on to miso soup or cooked fish. On the winter solstice, some Japanese also take a yuzu-yu, a hot bath in which whole yuzu fruit are floated in a cloth bag, a custom thought to date from the early 18th century. The treatment is believed to moisturise and perfume the body, relax the mind and ward off colds.

But few here are likely to be throwing yuzus into their baths any time soon, for one good reason – their eye-watering price. It’s not quite on a par with those for white truffles and saffron, but almost. That’s if you can get your hands on the fresh fruits at all.

Last year, James Wilkins managed to obtain them at his local wholesale market, but was paying around £11 per fruit. When he took a selfie of himself holding one and tweeted it, Nigel Slater immediately contacted his supplier asking for some, too. “The guys at the market split the load and gave us half each,” he recalls.

Wilkins has now found a Paris-based Japanese supplier (see box) who charges a fraction of the price – around £3 per fruit. “If you can possibly get hold of the fresh fruit, do, as the rind is where the real flavour is. It’s wonderful grated into a yuzu dressing to go with pan-fried fish or coleslaw, or mixed with the juice in a sorbet.”

His yuzu masterpiece is his Citrus Meringue dessert that’s essentially an elaborate Yuzu Mess. It consists of a meringue sphere containing zest of yuzu, orange, lime and lemon; and yuzu sorbet. The sphere rests on a base of pink grapefruit and orange jelly, surrounded by day-glo blobs of yuzu coulis. The thrilling bit is the explosion of yuzu, rich and yellow like the yolk of a soft poached egg, its citrusy tang a perfect foil to the sweetness of the meringue.

Wilkins also partners turbot fillet with heritage beetroots, young fennel and yuzu vinaigrette. “It’s a twist on the classic combo of orange, beetroot and fennel,” he says. “I’ve partnered it with turbot – you need a bold fish that can take on strong flavours without being overpowered.”

Other chefs are being equally creative with yuzu. Matt Gillan of The Pass restaurant in Sussex makes a yuzu tart, and uses the juice as a dressing on pork. MasterChef winner Anton Piotrowski blasts yuzu gas over his signature “Treby’s gone carrots” dessert, while Nigel Slater makes a yuzu dressing to accompany his crab and apple slaw. Chocolatier William Curley has made yuzu popular in the chocolate world, too. Introduced to the fruit by his Japanese wife Suzue, he originally obtained the fruits from Suzue’s great aunt, who grew them in her back garden in Japan. Curley now regularly uses yuzu in his chocolates and patisseries. “Other citrus fruits can be overpowering with chocolate, but the aroma of yuzu is far more delicate,” says Suzue.

“It used to be another aromatic citrus fruit, the pink grapefruit, that chefs used to wow their customers,” says James Wilkins. “Paris’s three-Michelin-starred Ledoyen restaurant [now closed] used to be world famous for its sensational grapefruit dessert. Now it’s yuzu that’s king of the citrus.”



Be that as it may, for the rest of us, fresh yuzus are still currently fiendishly hard to find. Apart from ordering them online, your only chance is to find them in an Asian supermarket.

But that’s likely to change. After all, who’d heard of persimmon or pomegranate 20 years ago? Let’s face it, even limes and pink grapefruit were considered exotic then. Waitrose’s citrus buyer, Tim Stevens, says his supermarket has “no immediate plans to stock fresh yuzu” but concedes that it “could be a possibility in the future”. London’s Japan Centre also says it’s talking to growers in Japan to supply them with fresh fruits. One factor likely to make yuzu more readily available in the UK is the fact that it’s now being grown alongside oranges in southern Spain. There’s even one grower in Sussex but, sadly, the trees won’t be productive for another decade. Yuzu’s a slow grower.

If you can’t get the fresh fruit, a good compromise is to buy yuzu puree (see box). The Japan Centre also stocks a wide range of products containing yuzu and says sales have increased by 140 per cent in the past year. Its bestseller is Yuzu Koshou paste (a hot and zesty condiment from yuzu, orange, chilli and pepper) followed closely by yuzu juice, which you can also find in Waitrose as part of its Chef’s Ingredients range. In summer, Waitrose offers a Lemon & Yuzu Eton Mess. Other supermarkets are following suit. Marks & Spencer sells an exotic-sounding Sparkling Brazilian Pink Guava & Asian Yuzu Pressé, and Sainsbury’s stocks a Mango and Yuzu Taste the Difference yoghurt.

For now, fresh yuzu may be the Holy Grail. But one day, perhaps, the fruits will be as common as oranges and lemons and we’ll be making yuzu meringue pie at home. I’ll have a big slice, please. ●

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#### YUZU VINAIGRETTE

BY JAMES WILKINS

Wilkins uses the dressing with turbot, but it would work equally well with other fish, vegetables or salads

- 60ml yuzu juice (plus finely grated zest of half a fresh yuzu if you have one)
- 60ml grape seed oil
- 60ml olive oil
- Pinch of salt
- 30g honey

Measure ingredients into a bowl and whisk.

Pour over salads as a dressing, or dot over dishes (see picture, bottom) as a sauce.

#### YUZU PRODUCTS TO USE AT HOME

Waitrose Cooks’ Ingredients Yuzu Juice (£4.59/60ml)

Haguruma Yuzu Citrus Juice (£9.99/70ml)  
Japan Centre, japancentre.com

Handmade Yuzu de Kochi puree (15.74€/430g), obtainable online via nishikidori.com. You can sometimes buy fresh yuzu fruit from here, too.

Mad about Yuzu Set (£29.50/723g) Contains juice, salt, koshou paste, yuzu and sesame dressing, yuzu seasoned soy sauce ponzu, yuzu citrus peel. japancentre.com

Yuzu Koshou paste (Spicy Citrus and Pepper) (£4.78/80g)

*Zest in show: fans used to pay around £11 a fruit for yuzus. That has now come down to £3 each – and may come down further*

## On the Menu

SAMUEL MUSTON



### Cocktails, crooning and a meal that was pure New York

According to my back-of-an-envelope calculation, I’ve eaten out about 150 times this year. I have eaten in cafés, in pubs, in hotel restaurants with 15-course tasting menus, at a hacienda in Mexico where the only drink on offer was straight tequila, and have had enough aeroplane food to last me a lifetime. Familiarity, in this context, doesn’t so much breed contempt as fatigue. It is easy to become jaded, amid all the food flummery; to forget that it is quite a privilege to live to eat.

Still though, some meals stick in the mind, ready to be reawakened when I feel the twinges of hunger and have only the office canteen to sate me. The thing is, I’ve come to realise over the years, meals that come with a bill that takes my breath away are seldom the ones that stay with me.

What was my favourite meal of the year, then? Well, much to my surprise, I find my mind alighting on two words, the name of a hotel: The Carlyle, in New York. Why this surprises me is that I seldom have much fun in a hotel dining room. And even less so when that dining room requires me to wear a jacket. But, nonetheless, we arrived at Café Carlyle and were shown to a table at the back. The first thing I noticed about the space was that all the tables were orientated to a piano and small stage at the front. And where usually one would look up and see chandeliers and stucco in this type of hotel, here there were stage lights.

I must confess, I didn’t quite realise what an institution Café Carlyle was. Only after I had eaten there did I find out that everyone from Eartha Kitt to Woody Allen played before the Marcel Vertès

murals. Nor, in fact, did I realise that the Rita Wilson on the bill was the actress and wife of Tom Hanks.

So I sat down without preconceptions and ordered one of the best dry martinis I can remember. Being a tad hungover, I chose the heaviest dish on the menu: a £25 extravaganza called Bobby Short’s Chicken Hash. Now, I have since looked at pictures of Bobby Short, who was the Carlyle’s resident performer from 1968-2004, and he is not a thin man – and I suspect that it has something to do with his chicken hash, which along with its fowl content also consisted of a bed of potatoes smothered in paté, truffle and “light sherry cream sauce”. It is not a dish you would call dainty but, my god, it was exactly the type of kill-or-cure food that I craved. Wilson began to sing and I ordered another martini. There followed a blissful hour of her crooning and me, slowly, determinedly sipping. I felt like I was in *Hannah and her Sisters*.

Why was it so good? It was, I think, one of those rare times when there is a perfect alignment of pleasing things. Surprise at the venue and the fact that I was actually enjoying what was effectively cabaret. Enjoyment of the expertly done martini, which came in a vast glass. But there was something more than that, though, something more important: I felt like I was in New York. It had an overwhelming sense of place.

And that is exactly what I would love in the next 150 restaurants of 2015: that more than anything, they have their own sense of time and place. Now that would make it a very happy new year indeed.



*Café Carlyle with its Marcel Vertès murals is a New York institution*