

TROPICAL FRUIT GROWERS NAME GUAVA 'FRUIT OF THE MONTH' FOR APRIL

The **Tropical Fruit Growers of South Florida**, a coalition of close to 100 South Florida growers and packers dedicated to serving the expanding national appetite for Florida's sweet, juicy, tropical fruit, have declared **guava** the fruit of the month for April. Just cited in the new U.S. dietary guidelines released by the federal government as the highest-ranked source of vitamin C, surpassing even oranges, guava is available most of the year and will be at its peak February to April. "6,000,000 pounds of guava, one of the most successful fruits to be grown and shipped in South Florida, will be harvested between March and September", according to **Reed Olszack**, chairman of the Tropical Fruit Advisory Board. Often used as a minor ingredient in well known desserts, such as the Cuban *pastelitos*, a flaky, guava filled pastry, today guavas are being showcased as the main ingredient in new dishes around the country, especially in South Florida, where chefs and consumers consider it a treasured natural resource.

Guavas are small, oval fruits about 2-6 inches in size, with a thin, light yellow-green edible skin. The ripe fruit softens to the touch and emits a sweet fragrance. The flesh of the guava can be white, pink, yellow or red, with numerous small edible seeds. It's naturally sweet and delicious as is, and can be eaten out of hand, sliced in fruit cups, pureed for cream desserts, juiced and used in punch and cocktails, ice cream and sodas, jams and jellies, or frozen for later use. Today, contemporary American chefs often incorporate guava into seafood, pork, poultry and salad recipes. Asian guavas, often used to add crunch and flavor to salads, may be eaten when green and are as crisp as apples.

The guava's sweet, flavorful taste is often described as one part pear, one part strawberry, and it's native to tropical America, from southern Mexico to Central America. Introduced to the Americas in 1847, from Cuba, the guava thrives year-round in the warm, humid climate of Florida. The fruit requires 120 days to mature with peak seasons generally occurring from August – October and February – March. Grown on a small tree with oblong leaves, the size of a typical guava is 1-5 inches in diameter and weighs from one ounce to two pounds with each tree producing 120 to 220 pounds of fruit per year. The best way to ensure a ripe fruit is to allow the fruit to ripen at room temperature until the peel color changes from light green to yellow.

Along with vitamin C, Florida guava is also an excellent source of vitamins B1, B6, niacin and phosphorus. One cup of raw guava contains 84 calories, .9 grams of fat, 260mg of potassium, 1.35 g of protein, and 8.9g of fiber, 218mg of vitamin C, .004mg of vitamin B1, B2, and B6.

The following recipes from some of South Florida's best known chefs, the Florida Department of Agriculture and the Tropical Fruit Growers of South Florida, are easy to prepare and complement a healthy lifestyle.

Tropical Fruit Growers of South Florida, Inc., headquartered in Homestead, Florida, grows, picks, packs and ships more than 20 sweet and succulent tropical fruits. To learn more about the organization, visit www.Florida-agriculture.com/tropical or email tropicalfruitgrowers@earthlink.net.

Consumers may access recipes and information about Florida tropical fruits, including guava, at www.florida-agriculture.com/tropical or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 407 S. Calhoun Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800.