

THE AUSTRALIAN

Queen garnet plum triggers talk of super-fruit health revolution

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Orchard manager Rowan Berecny inspects queen garnet plums near Stanthorpe in southern Queensland. Picture: Lyndon Mechielsen.

An isolated property near Stanthorpe, in Queensland's granite belt, has become the unlikely epicentre of what might prove to be something of a health revolution.

There resides the only sizeable commercial plantation in the world of the queen garnet plum, a fruit created for its antibacterial qualities that is now attracting global interest for its potent potential as a lifestyle super-fruit.

Earlier this year, even when the special properties of the fruit were little known, the first substantial crop was gobbled up in six weeks. When it hits the shelves again in late January, the rush to buy is likely to have even greater fervour.

In the meantime, negotiations are well advanced with major retailers to stock the plum's nectar, currently available only online and through a few select outlets. Planning is also under way for more growing areas, in a bid to expand the fruit season to 20 weeks.

So what makes it so special? Hugh Macintosh, from the company Nutrafruit, formed in Queensland six years ago to commercialise a variety of high-potential fruits developed by the state's Department of Primary Industries, says it is all in the anthocyanin, a powerful antioxidant found in the purple/red colours in fruit and vegetables. It is associated with a wide variety of health benefits.

"The queen garnet has the same class of anthocyanin as blueberries but testing suggests this plum has levels three to six times higher than blueberries," he said. "There is some obscure fruit out of the Amazon jungle and some Australian native fruits with higher anthocyanin levels but the queen garnet is the only one that can be produced as a horticultural fruit venture."

The other minor miracle is its taste. "It is an accident to have a variety so high in anthocyanin but also good to eat," Mr Macintosh said. "Normally fruit that is high in anthocyanin is reasonably bitter."

Beyond the known benefits of super-fruits on inflammatory conditions, Nutrafruit is reluctant to make claims about the health benefits. That has not stopped fans claiming the nectar is helping to stabilise their blood sugar levels, and trials will start soon to test the potential impact of the fruit on dementia treatment.

Much of the excitement about the queen garnet stems from the work of Lindsay Brown, from the biomedical sciences division of the University of Southern Queensland. Professor Brown did a 16-week trial on rats that were fed a diet so high in fat that it made them obese, increased their blood pressure and impacted their heart and liver functions. When queen garnet juice was added to their high-fat diet the functions and their weight returned to normal.

Nutrafruit director Alistair Brown says the company is planning to invest in human trials. “The scientists seem confident that the human trials will replicate the rat trials,” he said. “The queen garnet certainly seems unique compared to anything else that has been out there.”

For orchard manager Rowan Berecny, overseeing 75,000 of the trees over 80ha is a delicate balancing act of pest management, hoping for friendly weather and gearing to pick the crop at just the right time.

As word gets out, security is also becoming an issue, with several thefts having been reported.

“We know we are sitting on something pretty special here,” Mr Berecny says with just a hint of understatement.

3 COMMENTS



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Robyn

3 DAYS AGO

I wonder how they are keeping the Queensland Fruit Fly off the fruit. Pesticides?

LIKE REPLY



Ken

3 DAYS AGO

Red cabbage also has plenty of anthocyanin. This anti-oxidant gives red cabbage it's colour. Where is the broo-haa about eating red cabbage? Easy to find (and grow) and great in salads etc...

3 LIKE REPLY



Sanchia

3 DAYS AGO

For best results finely shred and eat raw with just a sprinkling of olive oil. Great for your skin and digestion.

LIKE REPLY