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By Luisa Cheshire

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## ***NCGM predicts top produce trends***

The UK's largest fresh produce wholesale market predicts top fruit and veg consumption trends for 2021



New Covent Garden Market supplies some of London's top restaurants

**L**ondon's New Covent Garden Market, which supplies fresh fruit and vegetables to some of the capital's top eateries, has predicted exotic citrus such as the yuzu fruit, avant-garde seasonal eating, new baking ingredients such as medjoul dates, and eating whole vegetables to reduce waste, as some of the hot trends coming to UK kitchens in 2021.

Traders predict a new wave of sweet and savoury flavour combinations on menus; mangoes and pomegranates topping shopping lists; and plates brimming with brassicas galore – with all-things-green making a huge comeback. Furthermore, at a time when home cooking is booming, convenience will be king for the now experienced family chef.

The market's annual Fruit and Vegetable Trends Report 2021 is based on qualitative trader insights from its 100 wholesalers, who supply London's

most fashionable restaurants – including La Gavroche, Sketch, Soho House, Jikoni, Darjeeling Kitchen, Restaurant Story, Pho and more.

While the market's traders boast the crème de la crème of the restaurant trade, in the last nine months many firms have also introduced direct-to-consumer home-delivery services.

The convenience factor, combined with the consumer reaction to the quality of the produce available from the market, leads traders to believe that demand for fresh produce delivery boxes will continue well into 2021.

Jason Tanner, owner of New Covent Garden Market based Premier Fruits and new business The Menu Partners, commented: "The demand for our service was incredible throughout the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and we decided to continue the offering, as many people were still enjoying our

service which delivered fresh fruit and vegetables along with many other food products."

With more food delivery options than ever before, comes the demand for unique ingredients. Recipes with quince, celeriac and redcurrants are all peaking interest with customers at New Covent Garden Market based Pollen + Grace, setting 2021 up to be the year that shoppers look beyond the supermarket for their fruit and vegetables.

Medjoul dates are one item garnering particular interest as their versatile nature means they can be blended up and used a sugar or caramel replacement in vegan baking. Furthermore, bakers and home cooks are set to start incorporating citrus flavours such as clementine and yuzu into their recipes as they offer a more complex flavour than lemon.

According to wholesaler Premier Fruits,

mangoes, pomegranate and sweet

Echoing many of the other traders, Jenny

market traders for, but this year it's

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potatoes from Europe are also growing in popularity, and the traders expect to see recipes that combine sweet and savoury notes sweep social feeds, inspiring menus and home cooks alike. Meanwhile, I.A. Harris & Sons cites that round pale aubergines are also becoming a very popular request, as their texture lends itself to a meat-like substitute.

The trend for plant-based dishes is also showing no signs of slowing down this year. Vegetables are set to take centre stage like never before. Hannah Turner from New Covent Garden Market's Classic Veg Box commented: "Aside from meat alternatives, we're seeing a rise in the hero vegetable. It's great to see vegetables celebrated as the star of the dish rather than as a side or addition."

With vegetables firmly on the menu, provenance will be key and the traders at New Covent Garden Market have experienced a notable trend for consumers questioning where their produce has come from and whether it has been produced sustainably.

Irvine from New Covent Garden Market-based Balance Box said: "We expect people to eat more British fruit and veg and seasonal eating as prices increase due to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had its own impacts on the global supply of fresh produce."

One of the top seasonal highlights for chefs has always been British asparagus season, which Hannah from Classic Veg Box predicts home cooks will rejoice in now that they are able to get their hands on this sought-after ingredient from the same suppliers who count Hawksmoor, Stanleys and Ormer Mayfair as customers.

British radicchio is also set to become a kitchen staple, and while it can be roasted or sautéed on its own, its punchy flavour will see it being diced up and added as a topping to everything from tacos to eggs on toast in 2021.

Rebecca Barrett, head of strategy, partnerships and communications for New Covent Garden Market, said: "It's always interesting to see what chefs and grocers are asking the

particularly exciting to see what consumers are choosing for their home delivery boxes. These insights give us the inside scoop on what will be inspiring home cooks and appearing on menus across the UK once restaurants reopen.

"Whilst it has been a tough year for the market with long periods when restaurants have been closed, we're delighted to see so many of our traders innovating and introducing the public to what is on offer through their box delivery services. With an abundance of sustainably produced British and international fruit and vegetables, New Covent Garden Market is fast becoming a mecca for home cooks."

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