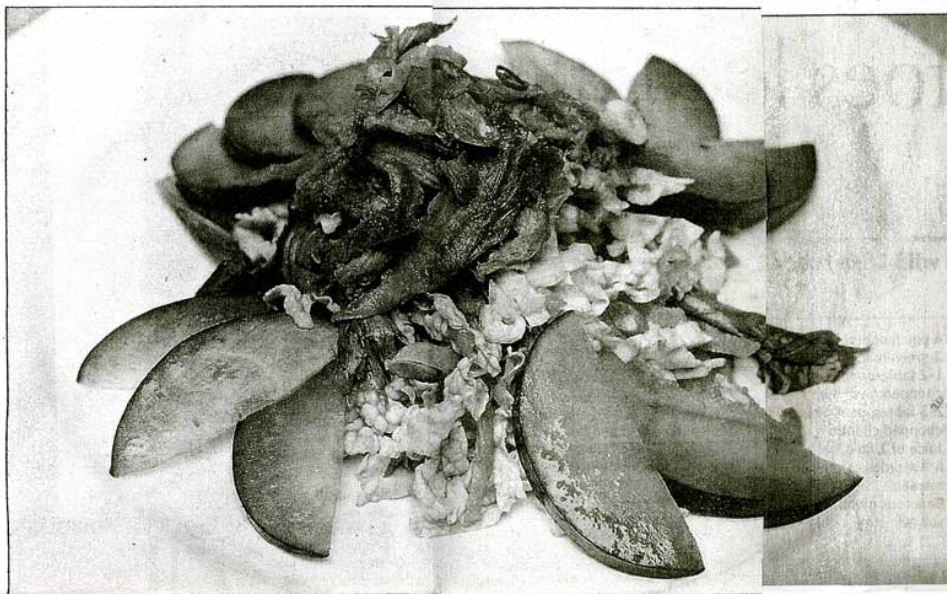


# Picked-to-perfection fruit is just a stone's throw away



PAUL CHINN / The Chronicle

Once you have your Chinese roast duck, Five-Spice Duck Salad with Plums & Plum Vinaigrette goes together in just minutes.

By Olivia Wu  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

**P**ick up a red bucket and traipse down corridors of full green trees and shrubs. Quick, keep step with the man with the bullhorn and long strides, and he'll stop and show you where you can pick some of the most delectable fruits of the summer.

It happens only a few times each year. Andy Mariani of Andy's Orchard in Morgan Hill will walk and talk you through his 30 acres in Santa Clara County — in what once was Valley of Heart's Desire because of its fecund agriculture — and nearly 250 varieties of old-fashioned and heirloom premium stone fruit. He'll stop where trees have been left unpicked, tell you about the variety and let you pick your own. A Stone Fruit 101 and U-pick day fused under the valley sun.

"The end of July is the apogee of the peach season," he says, and the Baby Crawfords, Suncrests, Silver Logans (white-fleshed with complex flavor), pluots such as Flavor Queen, and plums such as Golden Nectar, Padre and Inca are ripening.

Mariani insists that his fruit be picked by hand and only when ripe. Most commercial peach varieties are now selected for firmness and sugar, he says. "They're just sweet. The older, heirloom varieties

have sweetness, acidity and complex flavor. It's a kind that... well, drips. That's my recipe for quality. It oozes juice."

On the July 4 Harvest Walk, nearly 60 seekers traipsed after the farmer. The morning began with a 10 a.m. fruit tasting — table after table of peaches, nectarines, plums, pluots, apricots and the late cherries of the season. Mariani offers tastes of every variety he grows; he sells only 100 commercially. He talks about stone fruit the way a Napa grower talks about grapes and terroir.

"You don't want too rich a soil, and not too much water, so you have more intense-flavored fruit," he says. He'll talk about the solids and sugars in fruit and when they form and when they are at maximum. Then, he'll turn around, pluck a nectarine and sink his teeth in. "This Snow Queen is about as near a perfect nectarine as you can get."

Susan Spicer, chef-owner of Bayona in New Orleans, has Mariani's fruit shipped to Louisiana in highly protected boxes. "Ever have this ideal of fruit perfection in your mind? Well, I bit into one of Andy's peaches and it brought tears to my eyes," she says.

Mariani, a member of the California Rare Fruit Society and California Cherry Advisory Board's research committee, combines tradition and new agricultural know-how to keep his orchard di-

## Where to find the fruit

**Andy's Orchard**, 1615 Half Road, Morgan Hill; open during the summer from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, until 4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday. For more information, log on to [www.andysorchard.com](http://www.andysorchard.com).

**Sigona's**, 2345 Middlefield Road (near Woodside Road), Redwood City; and 399 Stanford Shopping Center, Palo Alto, carry some varieties.

**Cosentino's** markets in San Jose and Santa Clara carry a limited selection.

**Tours and tastings.** Andy's Orchard will offer three more fruit tastings and orchard tours beginning at 10 a.m. July 30, Aug. 6 and Aug. 13. To make reservations and to make sure the event will take place (it depends on the ripening progress), call (408) 782-7600.

verse — and to sustain a chunk of the valley as farmland and out of sprawl.

These old-fashioned peaches and plums — and similar ones from other premier growers — are so ripe when they're picked that you'll want to use them pretty quickly. Here are some near-instant ways to capture their flavors:

**6 Fruit Compote.** Halve or quarter a 1-to-3 ratio of plums to peaches or nectarines, pit, then simmer fruit with sugar to taste and zest of half a lemon. The skins of dark plums tint the resulting cooked fruit with a delectable blush. Cook until the plums fall apart and the skins are tender. Let cool. Use as a compote, fresh jam or ice cream

topping. Or spoon it straight off the saucepan into your mouth. Your house will be perfumed! plum essence. Best at room temperature.

**7 Summer Salsa.** Dice nectarines and peaches in ½-inch pieces. Toss with squeeze of lime juice, seeded and chopped jalapeno and cilantro green onions. Salt to taste.

**8 Grilled Fruit.** Halve nectarines and peach. Grill, basting with melt butter, until peaches are mark and warmed through. Or, be decadent: Dab butter in the pit hole and top with brown sugar and squeeze of lemon juice. Serve with ice cream, or as a side to grill fish, barbecued chicken or ribs

## 9 Five Spice Duck Salad with Plums & Plum Vinaigrette

Chef-owner Susan Spicer of New Orleans' Bayona created this salad using fruit from Andy's Orchard in Morgan Hill.

### INGREDIENTS:

□ Meat from Chinese Five Spice roast duck (2 leg quarters or ½ roast duck)

### Dressing

□ 1 ripe plum  
□ 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar  
□ 1 tablespoon hoisin sauce  
□ 1 teaspoon honey  
□ Juice of 1 lime  
□ 1 teaspoon minced ginger  
□ ½ teaspoon minced garlic  
□ Salt to taste

□ Sambal oelek (Indonesian red chile paste) to taste

□ ½ cup peanut or canola oil

□ 2 cups shredded napa cabbage

□ 1 cup mizuna, tat soi or sunflower sprouts

□ 1 small carrot, shredded or julienned

□ 3 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal

□ 4 ripe plums, pitted and sliced into thin wedges

**INSTRUCTIONS: Dressing:** Place all ingredients except oil in a blender and puree for 1 minute. With motor running, drizzle in oil. Adjust consistency with a little water if necessary. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and sambal.

**Salad:** Warm duck meat in a skillet with a little of the dressing. Toss all salad ingredients together to coat; divide among serving plates. Top with duck, drizzle with remaining dressing.

Serves 4

**PER SERVING:** 490 calories, 8 g protein, 37 g carbohydrate, 36 g fat (5 g saturated), 27 mg cholesterol, 256 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.

## 10 Mariani Peach & Lemon Verbena Parfait

Megan Roen, pastry chef for New Orleans' Bayona, created this recipe using fruit from Andy's Orchard in Morgan Hill.

### INGREDIENTS:

#### Meringue

□ ½ cup sliced, blanched almonds

□ ½ cup granulated sugar

□ ½ cup powdered sugar

□ 12 dried, crushed verbena leaves (sun-dried for 1 day)

□ 2 egg whites

□ Pinch of salt

#### Panna Cotta

□ 1 envelope granulated gelatin

□ ½ cup whole milk

□ 1 cup heavy cream

□ ½ cup sugar

□ 10 leaves fresh lemon verbena, roughly chopped

□ 1 cup buttermilk

#### Peaches

□ 2 ripe peaches, peeled, pitted and sliced

□ 2 tablespoons granulated sugar, or to taste

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Preheat oven to 250°. Combine almonds, ¼ cup granulated sugar, the powdered sugar and verbena in a processor. Process until smooth. In an electric mixer fitted with a whisk attachment, beat egg whites and salt on slow speed until foamy. Slowly pour in remaining ¼ cup sugar, beating until whites are stiff but not grainy. Remove bowl from machine. Fold in almond mixture in 3 additions.

Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Spoon 4-inch rounds of meringue onto sheets. Bake for 2 hours, or until dry. Cool completely, remove from paper and store in an airtight tin.

**Panna cotta:** Stir gelatin into milk. Let stand 5 minutes. Combine cream, sugar and verbena in a saucepan. Bring to a boil, remove from heat and let cool for 10 minutes. Strain into a bowl, then return liquid to pan. Add gelatin mixture, bring to a boil, then pour into a bowl. Cool in an ice-water bath, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Stir in buttermilk. Pour into four 7-ounce martini glasses. Refrigerate to set, at least 4 hours.

**To assemble:** Toss peaches with sugar. Top panna cotta with a meringue round, then pile on peaches and juices. Serves 4.

**PER SERVING:** 645 calories, 11 g protein, 81 g carbohydrate, 32 g fat (15 g saturated), 88 mg cholesterol, 170 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.