

Amorentia launches new, sweeter dragon fruits

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South African company Amorentia Nursery is promoting a new collection of dragon fruits imported from the US.



Howard Blight, owner of Amorentia Estate, said: “Predominantly consumed in Asia, dragon fruit, also known as pitaya, looks exotically gorgeous, and is packed with nutrients, but its reputation for taste is generally poor. This is attributable to the predominance of the commercial cultivation of largely only the flavourless varieties. However, this is set to change drastically. New selections, imported from the US, now answer two former issues: a sweeter, punchier fruit that is also self and naturally pollinated.”

The dragon fruit plant is of the cactus family. It is a climbing vine-like epiphytic plant that regularly produces its own roots – that, in commercial farming, cling to the posts provided – and are densely planted on individual posts or trellis systems. As many as 1,250-1,500 individuals can be planted per hectare and it typically yields 20-30 tonnes/ha when in full production. Under good management the plants will come into production within 12 months. According to Amorentia, farmers can expect to break even in the third season on annual costs.

Dragon fruit grows well in subtropical, frost free, regions and is said to need less than half the water of typical subtropical crops.

Amorentia noted that there tends to be between 380-600 stomatal pores (where gas exchange takes place) per sq. mm in most subtropical crops. Dragon fruit has only 11.

“It is a highly drought resistant, energy efficient plant that can go into dormancy if needed. They have shown to be relatively free from disease thus far, although are reported to be partially susceptible to fruit fly in certain areas. Minimal chemical spraying is required,” the firm added.

Dragon fruit is a long day plant, thriving on sunlight and needs approximately 12 hours of sunlight a day to stimulate flowering.

Amorentia Nursery has implemented an LED lighting system that is timed to come on between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., to stimulate flowering and produce fruit that can be picked out of season. The first crop from this pilot is expected in July and August this year.

Blight added: “Until planting material for any given crop is available in a country, no food industry can develop. There can be no supply to the market until farmers undertake production. Which is why we have spent the past five years nurturing and refining propagation of the more recent selections to support future demand.

“Eight varieties under the Amorentia Sweet Dragon Fruit brand have been trademarked. They come in an array of white, pink and red and are sensationally and vividly named: Sweet Ballet, Sweet Flamingo, Sweet Fuschia, Sweet India, Sweet Lady in Red, Sweet Magenta, Sweet Snow and Sweet Sunset. We needed to assist the consumer, to differentiate the old bland tasting Dragon Fruits, from these super-sweet, modern selections, that are so delicious to eat.

To ensure growers are in good hands, a marketing company, Amorentia Sweet Dragon Fruit Marketing, has been established. Its function is to ensure research and insights and developments, as well as the appointment of licensed, local market agents exporters and importers. The marketing company has appointed research biologist, Frans Kruger, and a field officer will be appointed as production rises, to advise farmers.



CT van der Merwe, the chief executive of Al 3 Boerdery (one of the largest potato farming businesses in South Africa) has been appointed as chairperson of the Amorentia Sweet Dragon Fruit Marketing Company.

For every hectare planted, the grower is awarded with one share in the marketing company, thus becoming a shareholder in their own, grower-owned company.

Blight concluded: “Plans to stimulate demand for a better understanding by consumers, of how to differentiate these special new dragon fruit selections, through in-store tastings and promotions, are under way. We are delighted by the interest and response from leading national retailers and international exporters, who have visited our farm to taste and be blown away by these new super-sweet selections.”