

# SOURCE

## Citrus Surprises

These fruits are anything but garden variety

BY KATHLEEN BRENNAN

**A**MID THE MANY giant farms in California's Central Valley that supply the everyday oranges and grapefruits stocked by supermarkets all over America lies Rising C Ranches. Owned by Eric and Kim Christensen, Rising C is a small operation selling about 40 unusual citrus fruits, including (right, from top) the chandler pummelo, variegated pink lemon, buddha's hand, heirloom navel orange, and moro blood orange—all grown with painstaking care and notable for their depth and intensity of flavor.

In 1988, Eric was unhappily employed at a major citrus-packing firm; Kim was a dental assistant. Eric had long been interested in specialty citrus, so when a friend offered to sell him a 60-acre citrus farm in Reedley, about 25 miles southeast of Fresno, he seized the opportunity. Soon thereafter, the Christensens planted their first crop: low-acid palestine sweet limes. They began selling the fruit in 1992 and developed a strong following from an unexpected source: Southern California's sizable Iranian population. Sensing the potential in growing for various ethnic groups, the Christensens began planting other varieties, including obscure heirloom ones. In the process, they discovered that many cultures prefer fruit with the leaves attached, as both a sign of freshness and a visual enhancement. The pair started providing a "stem and leaf" option, becoming among the first commercial growers in the country to do so.

The couple use only disease-free budwood and pay obsessive attention to microclimatic variations in deciding where to grow different crops. Rising C is not an organic producer, but it practices sustainable farming and uses chemicals sparingly. The Christensens hand-harvest each fruit (about 50 million pieces last year) only when each has reached peak ripeness—an anomaly in an industry in which entire fields are typically picked at the same time. "This can be tough for retailers, who have a delivery schedule they want to adhere to," says Eric. "But the stuff's got to taste good, so they have to wait or go elsewhere. They won't get it from us until it's ready." Rising C Ranches citrus fruit, available from October to May, costs around \$2 per pound, plus shipping. The selection varies from week to week. To order, call 559/637-9546 or visit [www.ripetoyou.com](http://www.ripetoyou.com).

