

**FINGER-LICKIN' GOOD**

Finger lime pearls  
from The Lime Caviar  
Company, winner of the  
Outstanding Innovation  
Award at the *delicious.*  
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# GIVING THE WORLD THE FINGER

It took an international top chef to put this humble native on the map.  
LINDY ALEXANDER investigates how the finger lime is taking the world by storm

**W**hen acclaimed chef Rene Redzepi departed Australia after 10 weeks of running Sydney's Noma pop-up early last year, one thing was on his mind. Asked which local ingredient he loved working with Down Under, Redzepi said: "It would definitely be the finger lime. That has to be one of the most iconic ingredients of the world - it's perfect for just anything, and I wish we had it in Denmark."

Redzepi's desire may well come true. Rumour has it that the chef is cultivating a finger lime tree of his own. There are already plantations of *citrus australasica* in California, Israel and France as the world attempts to feed its lust for the bright Aussie local. But what is it about the fine-skinned, oval-shaped fruit with its glossy, popping, caviar-like pearls that has chefs and diners so enraptured?

"I love the fragrance and the sour hit of the finger lime caviar," says chef Mat Lindsay from Ester in Sydney's Chippendale. Finger limes are commonly paired with seafood, and Lindsay uses them in a crab sauce with salt and white pepper.

"It's this fiery sauce where you get fresh bursts of citrus at the end that clean your palate," he says. Lindsay has also used the tart globes to lift caramelised pineapple, and has toasted the skin to make a smoky powder. "There are so many ways to use finger limes rather than just scattering them over oysters," he says.

The fruit of the thorny plant has been a source of food for indigenous Australians for many centuries.

Chef and restaurateur Kylie Kwong has been using them in her cooking for

more than six years and isn't surprised about their growing popularity. "I just love the texture of those globular vesicles, the crunch, the acidity, the versatility and the glorious colours of the different varieties," she says. "There was an enormous amount of coverage on the deliciousness and versatility of finger limes when Rene Redzepi was in town, and his own obsession helped raise awareness."

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Kwong loves pairing freshly squeezed finger limes and saltbush salt with caramelised Flinders Island wallaby tail. "The saltiness, the acidity, the sweet succulence of the tail creates a wonderful balance and an interesting mix of flavours, textures and colours," she says.

"I love a freshly squeezed finger lime in a gin and tonic."

Going one better, you could enjoy gin made using the limes' tangy flesh. Head distiller of Four Pillars Gin, Cameron Mackenzie, says finger limes don't distil like an ordinary lime. "Finger limes are just spectacular because they give a lime vanillin character," he says. "They are intense and fragrant, and go beautifully with South-East Asian spices." He combines coriander, star anise, ginger and turmeric to fill out the bright finger lime flavour in Four Pillars' Navy Strength gin.

Finger limes are native to northern New South Wales and south-east Queensland, and there are around 50 finger lime farmers in Australia. One of the biggest growers is Ian Douglas of The Lime Caviar Company. The former Melbourne QC retired to southern Queensland in 2007. "My wife Margie really discovered finger limes," he says. "She had bought a tree years ago but we didn't really know what it

was. We had seen the fruit but thought it was poisonous so we didn't touch it." After reading a magazine article, Margie realised the fruit wasn't toxic and in fact presented an opportunity to be at the forefront of a new agricultural industry. The couple now has 4,500 trees bearing six varieties on their 30-acre property in the Scenic Rim. This coming season Douglas hopes to produce more than 18,000kg of fruit that will sell for \$40 per kilo.

Douglas' finger limes are regularly found on the menus of Brae and Attica in Victoria, and Wasabi and Rickys in Queensland. "Demand is growing more than double each year. It's just exploded," he says. Douglas exports fresh fruit to France, The Netherlands, Italy, Singapore, Hong Kong and Spain, and distributes frozen pods to Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and New Zealand.

As of February, Douglas will sell pure, seedless and spoonable frozen finger lime caviar. "There's no equivalent on the market," he says. "I've given samples to top chefs and they have loved it. It will save them labour because they don't have to remove the seeds."

While the frozen product means that Douglas' limes will be available all year, Gerard Buchanan already grows a variety that fruits year round. Towards the end of its Australian stay, Noma was buying around 25kg of finger limes from Buchanan each week. While some have names such as Pink Ice or Sunrise, Buchanan's most popular variety, a native to his Chillingham farm, is simply known as, "The lime green finger lime".

As the world scrambles for the Aussie native, Australian locals can purchase the citrus. Available from good grocers and Woolworths, finger limes are now being sprinkled over oysters, stirred into cocktails and paired with rich meat by home cooks, too. ★  
*Find finger lime recipes on [delicious.com.au](http://delicious.com.au)*