

New Sensations

One F&F company explores Africa for new and novel sensory profiles

Robertet USA president Peter Lombardo says, “In today’s very competitive environment, perfumers and flavorists constantly are searching for novel raw materials and accords, thus establishing new trends in fragrances and flavors for our customers.” To that end, the company implemented its CosmAfrica program, seeking new F&F materials (and thus profiles) in South Africa. About 10% of all known plant species are located there—that’s more than 20,000 different varieties—making the country a rich hunting ground for new F&F profiles. Robertet’s CosmAfrica program is centered in South Africa’s Cape Floral Kingdom, a Mediterranean climate in the southwest part of the country that extends east into the Eastern Cape Province. According to the company, the region is home to some 9,000 indigenous plant species, 70% of which grow nowhere else on the planet.

“Bio-Prospecting” for New Tastes and Scents

Robertet’s CosmAfrica program has yielded several interesting results, including **Minneola** and **naartjie tangerines**, **Kei apple** (*Dovyalis caffra*; this is not, in fact, an apple, but, rather, an acidic yellow or orange berry), and **wild apricot**, which is a versatile flavor component in many South African dishes, including as a jam served with salted cod, tomatoes and potatoes, and as the base of a Dutch-derived pudding. Robertet has investigated a number of other unique flora in the region:

- **Mobola plum** (*Parinari curatellifolia*) has been analyzed by Robertet and University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) researchers.¹ While investigating the fruit’s volatile flavor components, the researchers identified

a total of 88 components, including 2-aminobenzaldehyde and phenylacetaldoxime (interestingly “detected for the first time in an edible fruit”). The study also noted “two unusual nitrated compounds,” including (2-nitrobutyl)benzene, “which is a new natural product.”

- **Jambu** (*Spilanthes acmella*) is a particularly notable find in the region. The plant’s flower extract reportedly has little or no odor, but imparts salty and tingly (or even numbing) organoleptic properties. The plant’s taste characteristics also have been compared to Tasmanian, Sichuan and water pepper varieties.
- Sweet-nutty **rooibos** (*Aspalathus linearis*), although traditionally used in teas, is actually a legume. Its antioxidant-rich composition has made it popular with an increasingly health-conscious consumer public.
- **Guavadilla** is exactly what it sounds like—a guava crossed with a granadilla (passion fruit). The resulting fruit has a reportedly aggressive sweet-sour flavor that is similar to that of passion fruit.
- The fruit of the **marula** tree turns a waxy yellow as it ripens, emitting a strong, sweet smell that is reminiscent of apple. The pulp is rich in vitamin C and reportedly tastes similar to lychee, guava, apple and pineapple. Marula fruit traditionally is made into jam or even beer or wine, while its nutty-tasting seeds are used in relishes and chutneys.

Trend Tracking: Gourmand Scents

Robertet USA director of marketing Nancy Bager says that, in addition to CosmAfrica, the company stays on top of the latest F&F trends via a number of sources. “In addition to looking at various global databases that we subscribe to, as well as our internal databases, we have a global trend-spotting/lifestyle translation team in place,” she says. “We conduct quarterly brainstorming sessions, as well as themed ethnic food tastings, to stimulate our perfumers.”

What has Bager taken away from these information streams?

“Edible/confectionery-based fragrances are very hot right now,” she notes. “This trend spans the gamut to everything from fine fragrance to air-care products. More exotic florals, fruits and spices are being explored in perfumery to give fragrances a special or unique hook.”

References

1. D. Joulain, A. Casazza, R. Laurent, D. Portier, N. Guillamon, R. Pandya, M. Le and A. Viljoen, *Volatile Flavor Constituents of Fruits from Southern Africa: Mobola Plum* (*Parinari curatellifolia*). *J. Agric. Food Chem.*, **52** (8), 2322–2325 (2004).

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