

The European market potential for exotic tropical fruit

European consumers have a growing interest in new flavours and fruit varieties. This leads to a higher market value for exotic fruit with most imports in northern Europe. Communicating the health benefits of exotic fruit can help increase the demand. Pomegranates, passion fruit, physalis and lychees may be leading the demand, but other exotics such as pitahaya, rambutan and carambola are definitely part of the growth potential.

Contents of this page

1. [Product description](#)
2. [What makes Europe an interesting market for exotic fruit?](#)
3. [Which European countries offer most opportunities for exotic fruit?](#)
4. [Which trends offer opportunities on the European exotic fruit market?](#)









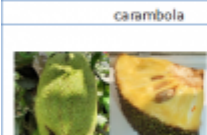

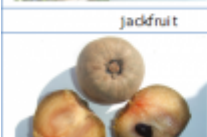
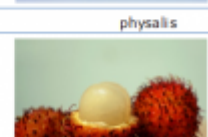
1. Product description

This product study covers a number of fresh exotic fruits that are traded under the Harmonized System (HS) codes 08109020 and 08109075 (see table 1 below). See the [Classification and Latin names for edible fruit and nuts in the EU Trade Helpdesk](#).

Some of these exotic fruits are relatively known in Europe and marketed in higher volumes, such as pomegranates, passion fruit and to a certain extend lychees and physalis. Other fruits such as cactus figs, medlars and cherimoya have a strong regional consumption. These are most common in the Mediterranean region due to their local production. Less common exotics that often have to be imported include pitahaya, rambutan and jackfruit.

See also the specific [CBI product studies on promising export products](#) for some of the mainstream exotics such as [pomegranates](#) and [lychees](#), niche exotics like [rambutan](#) and tropical fruits that are not included in this study such as fresh mangoes, papayas, coconut or persimmons.

Table 1: Overview of Harmonized System (HS) codes and examples of several exotic fruits in within these codes

Exotic fruit with HS code 08109020	Exotic fruit with HS code HS 08109075
lychee (HS 0810902090)	pomegranate (HS 0810907530)
passion fruit (HS 0810902090)	prickly pear / cactus fig (HS 0810907550)
pitahaya (HS 0810902010)	medlar (HS 0810907560)
carambola (HS 0810902090)	cherimoya (HS 0810907590)
jackfruit (HS 0810902020)	physalis (HS 0810907590)
sapodillo plums (HS 0810902090)	rambutan (HS 0810907590)
tamarinds (HS 0810902090)	goji berries (HS 0810907510)
cashew apple (HS 0810902090)	other exotic fruit (HS 0810907590)
	
lychee	pomegranate
	
passion fruit	prickly pear / cactus fig
	
pitahaya	medlar
	
carambola	cherimoya
	
jackfruit	physalis
	
sapodillo plums	rambutan

Sources: Wikipedia by [SMasters](#) (pitahaya), [fir0002flagstaffotos](#) (passion fruit), [I, Luc Viatour](#) (lychee), [Agnieszka Kwiecień](#) (cherimoya), [Silverije](#) (medlar), [Hans B.](#) (sapodillo plum, jackfruit) and other fruit images by [Pixabay](#).

For HS codes see: [Taric Support](#) and [Classifying edible fruit & nuts of EU Trade Helpdesk](#)

2. What makes Europe an interesting market for exotic fruit?

An increasing import value is a good indication of a growing demand for new exotic fruit varieties. The best timing to supply these fruits are specific holiday seasons such as Christmas, Easter and Ramadan.

Import value of exotics increases

Every year more exotics are being imported with a value that increases faster than the import volume. The market shows gradual growth. But more money to spend also means more room for exclusive products.

The import value of exotics such as fresh lychees, passion fruit, carambola and pitahaya (HS 08109020) increased 40% over the past five years to 142 million euros in 2019. Other exotic fruit (HS 08109075), mainly pomegranates, experienced a growth of 21% and reached a total value of 202 million euros in 2019.

The growth in value can be an indication of higher prices for exotics or that more exclusive varieties are being

imported. Exotic fruits are often in the beginning of their lifecycle; their market is not yet mature and there is room for them to grow. The time that these fruit need to develop depends on the specific variety and their promotion.

Pomegranates have become a more common exotic fruit in Europe and available throughout most of the year. Passion fruit, lychees and physalis are also sold by several major retailers on different occasions, while rambutan and pitahaya are still considered more of a specialty.

Seasons with peak demand for exotics

There is a year round demand for exotic fruits, especially for mainstream exotics such as pomegranates. However, special holidays significantly increase the demand, increasing the opportunities for a wider variety of exotics.

There are clear import peaks in December and April/May (see figure 2). Christmas and New Year are key moments for consumers to spend extra on luxury and exotic food. Especially lychees are a typical fruit during this period, but also attractive looking fruit such as pitahaya and physalis have a peak in demand around this time. In April and May, Easter and the end of Ramadan play an important role. May is also a period when Peru and South Africa push a high volume of pomegranates into the European market. During the European summer (July-August) the demand slows down mainly due to the availability of local in-season fruits.

When exporting exotic fruits, you must take into account seasonal demand and adjust your production and supply planning.

Tips:

Follow news and developments of different exotic fruits on [FreshPlaza](#), [FreshFruitPortal](#), [Eurofruit](#) (Fruitnet) and [Fruitrop online](#).

Go to the [CBI market information platform](#) to get additional information about the market for [pomegranates](#) and [lychees](#).

3. Which European countries offer most opportunities for exotic fruit?

The consumption of niche fruits is traditionally strongest in Southern Europe where many fruits are cultivated. For imported exotics, however, your best opportunities can be found in Northern Europe, with high import values for Germany and France and an attractive and varied demand from the United Kingdom. The Netherlands and Belgium facilitate much of the European import.

COVID-19 (May 2020)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the potential opportunities described below may be distorted temporarily. You must anticipate a short-term dip in demand, especially in countries with a strong wholesale channel that have taken strict measures such as France, Spain and Italy. Imports of niche and air-freighted exotics through the Netherlands will also be reduced for at least several months to come. The medium and long-term impact is still unknown. If the COVID-19 pandemic is followed by an economic recession, the trade of high-value and luxury fruit could be affected for a longer period.

The short-term opportunities may be slowed down due to COVID-19 and the closure of restaurants and other food service providers. But the long-term growth expectation is still positive, depending on the specific fruit type, destination market and promotion.

The Netherlands: Best entry market for niche exotics

Most of the exotic fruit to Europe is traded through the Netherlands. This strong trade position can be a good reason to start your business by finding importers in the Netherlands.

You can find several import companies that specialise in exotics. For fruit marketers in other European countries, especially countries with a lower consumption of imported exotics, it is often easier to use trade channels in the Netherlands. Because of the Dutch trade dominance you will also find a wide variety of exotic fruit in the Netherlands, even though the exotic fruit consumption may be lower than in Germany or France.

The highest value consists of pomegranates, which are part of the exotic fruit group in HS code 08109075 with an import value of 186.8 million euros in 2019 (all sources). But with 62.2 million euros the Netherlands is also an important importer of passion fruit, physalis, lychees and other fruit within the HS code 08109020.

Dutch imports have the highest share of non-European supply and somewhere around 80% is re-exported. Its main non-European suppliers are Peru (17.5 million in 2019) and Colombia (14.8 million in 2019). Once exotic fruits are being introduced in mainstream market channels, direct trade may bypass Dutch importers. In niche products the Netherlands will keep playing an important role in the European distribution.

Tips:

Find importers on the [member site of the GroentenFruitHuis sector association](#). You can find several exotic specialists such as BUD Holland and Yex, but there are many more that are not on this list.

Connect with Dutch traders at relevant trade events and use their experience to get to know the market. Exotic specialists such as [Nature's Pride](#), [Roveg](#) and [BUD Holland](#) are well-represented at the [Fruit Logistica](#) trade fair in Berlin.

Germany: Popular market for pomegranates and physalis

Germany is one of the biggest consumers of imported exotic fruit, in particular pomegranates and physalis. Other exotic fruits are also slowly gaining popularity.

In 2019, Germany imported 80.9 million euros of pomegranates, physalis and other small exotic fruit with HS code 08109075. Other exotics with HS code 08109020 such as lychees and passion fruit amounted to 36.6 million euros.

Turkey is Germany's main supplier of exotic fruit, followed by Spain and the Netherlands. This is because of an active Turkish community and a high consumption of pomegranates. Peruvian and Colombian suppliers follow further behind; Peru most likely adding to the pomegranate supply and Colombia mainly exporting physalis to Germany (3.1 million euros in 2018).

German consumers are slowly becoming more familiar with a wider offer of exotics. The strict requirements on quality and food safety and a preference for local organic fruit are important factors that may restrict a fast growth. A possible way to reduce food safety concerns and get consumers more familiar with exotic fruit may be by exporting processed or frozen products.

Tips:

Take away potential concerns of German buyers and guarantee a low-pesticide residue product. Use the Lidl standard of 33% of the legal European limit. Learn more about the German market and its specific requirements in the [CBI study on Exporting fresh fruit and vegetables to Germany](#).

Find potential partners in Germany in the database [Lieberanten.de](#) (in German), for example by selecting [suppliers of physalis](#).

France: Strong seasonal demand for lychees

France is an important market for exotic fruits. Despite the strong focus on locally produced fruits, specialised and ethnic wholesalers contribute to a significant market for imported exotics. There is an especially strong seasonal demand for lychees.

Of the 89.3 million euros of imported exotic fruit, 53.4 million euros consisted of fresh lychees, passion fruit, pitahaya, carambola, tamarinds, cashew apples, jackfruit and sapodillo plums with HS code 08109020. Madagascar and Vietnam are France's main non-European suppliers, making lychees one of the most valuable fruits in this exotic import range. Pomegranates (belonging to HS 08109075) are another big segment with Spain, Peru and Israel dominating the market.

The French market offers a combination of relevant retail and wholesale channels. Retailers with a focus on fresh products such as [Grand Frais](#) and wholesale markets such as [Rungis](#) offer opportunities for a wide range of exotic products besides the usual French assortment.

You can expect the consumption of exotic fruit to continue to grow, but keep in mind that there will always be the competition with local fruits.

Tip:

Get an impression of the exotic fruit variety in France by visiting the [Rungis wholesale market](#) or check the prices of specific products (in French) in different French channels on the [Market News Network of FranceAgriMer](#).

United Kingdom: Good volume with pressure on price

The United Kingdom is generally a good end market for imported fresh fruit, including exotics. It offers opportunities for many different supply countries, but the development in value has been slow.

Pomegranates are the most important exotic fruit, being the main import product with HS code 08109075. This product group had an import value of 43.6 million euros and depended on several non-European suppliers such as Egypt, Peru, Turkey, South Africa and India (all are known producers of pomegranates).

Other exotics, including lychees, pitahaya and passion fruit (HS code 08109020) reached an import value of 14.8 million euros in 2019. These fruits were mainly supplied by South Africa, Malaysia, Thailand and Colombia.

Traditionally the United Kingdom is a good market for new fruit varieties. The marketing of both convenience products and exclusive products usually goes well despite of a highly competitive market. The import volume is

still increasing, but the import value in euros has developed slower due to a devaluation of the British Pound. The pressure on British prices is also felt in the trade. The current pressure on prices and the uncertainty of Brexit (UK leaving the European Union) may slow down the import of higher priced exotic fruit.

Tip:

Stay informed about the developments of Brexit and the transition period on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Belgium: Opportunities for re-export of lychees and pomegranates

Belgium imports a relatively large amount of exotic fruit. It mainly provides a transit port for sea freighted exotics, with a large volume of lychees and growing opportunities for pomegranates.

Belgium had an import value of 31.2 million euros in 2019 of fresh lychees, passion fruit, pitahaya and other exotics within HS code 08109020. Belgium is a major shipping route for lychees from Madagascar to the French market. As a result Madagascar is the main origin of exotic fruit and the import values of Belgium and France are directly linked to each other.

Other exotics under HS code 08109075 had a lower total import value in 2019 of 26.6 million euros, but showed a strong growth of 52% in the last five years. This product group mainly consists of pomegranates, which were re-exported to mostly Germany and France.

In addition to providing a logistical hub for exotic fruit, Belgium hosts specialised importers for such products like the company [SpecialFruit](#) and [Starfruit](#), as well as the head office of [Greenyard](#), one of the largest fruit companies in the world that actively works on moving niche products into mainstream markets.

Italy: Producer and indirect importer of exotic fruit

Italy has a large consumer market, but most exotic fruits are produced locally or are imported from other European countries. Italian fruit professionals see a positive future for exotic fruits, although it is a challenging task to get new fruit introduced to the Italian consumer.

Italy and other Mediterranean countries produce a fair amount of fruits that are considered exotic in most other European countries. Among these fruits are pomegranates, passion fruit, cactus fig, medlars, cherimoya and even some pitahaya.

Additionally, Italy imported 54.6 million euros of exotic fruit in 2019 with a gradual increase over the last five years. Up to 80% of the exotic import value concerns pomegranates and other local exotics from Spain. Exotic fruit such as lychees, passion fruit and pitahaya were imported via the Netherlands and France. The few successful non-European suppliers include Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia which are mainly pomegranate-related.

In recent years a few Italian companies such as [Spreafico](#) and [Fresh Tropical](#) have promoted tropical and more exotic fruits. This effort may feed the demand for exotic fruit as well as the direct import from different origin countries. For now, the real exotics that need to come from abroad are best traded via the Netherlands.

Tip:

Get in touch with exotic fruit importers in Italy by attending the [Tropical Fruit Congress](#) or [Macfrut trade 7fair](#).

4. Which trends offer opportunities on the European exotic fruit market?

The interest in new flavours and healthy fruit has created specific markets for exotic fruit. For exporters of exotic fruits it is important to have an attractive and marketable selection of high-quality products.

Interest in new fruit and flavours

There is more exchange between ethnic or traditional markets and consumers that are interested in new fruits. This increases the potential for exotic fruits and new flavours.

Food blogs contribute to the increasing number of consumers and food professionals that experiment with exotic fruits. Restaurants use exotic fruit to innovate or decorate their dishes, for example by decorating desserts with physalis or carambola. In the retail landscape fresh fruit has always played an important role and many retailers use exotic varieties to differentiate themselves and make their assortment more attractive.

Taste is important for exotic fruit to become successful. Exotic fruit is generally expensive, therefore taste and the way the consumer experiences your product are very important. You must make sure your product arrives in perfect condition and adjust your offer to the target market. For example, the company [Frutireyes](#) from Colombia exports at least eight different exotic fruits. They have made their extended offer ready for large retail channels by adopting relevant quality and ethical standards such as GlobalG.A.P. and SEDEX Smeta.

Tip:

Select an attractive and diverse offer of exotic fruits. This will make your company more interesting to potential buyers and give you an advantage in combining shipments or mixing pallets.

Attention to health drives specific exotic consumption

Several exotic fruit types are well-known for being healthy. Since European consumers have embraced healthy and tasty fruit, health benefits have become one of the main drivers for market success. Examples of exotic fruit with health benefits:

- Pomegranate is a good source of fibre, vitamins A, C, E and K and minerals such as calcium, potassium and iron. It is popular in ethnic markets but also as an ingredient in fresh salads or flavoured water.
- Carambola is rich in antioxidants and vitamin C and low in sugar, sodium and acid. It has the potential to grow in the European market if proven health benefits are communicated effectively.
- Passion fruit and maracuyá have high levels of vitamin A and C, making them a healthy fruit for direct consumption and fresh juices.
- Lychees contain high levels of antioxidants and vitamin C, which is a good selling point besides the unique taste of the fruit.
- Kumquats, a citrus fruit that is consumed with the skin, contains high levels of vitamin C and is rich in fibres and minerals.

For exporters it is important to meet the consumer expectation of a healthy product. You must supply a clean, sustainable and pesticide-free product. An organic certification can be an extra plus.

Exotics become better available with improved packaging

Exotics are often air-freighted, partly because of the smaller volumes that buyers need, but also to maintain the best shelf life for their clients. With the improvement in handling and packaging technology the shelf life is being extended and sea freight helps exotic fruit to become better available.

Your product can reach a wider audience once it moves from specialised channels to supermarkets and general retailers. A longer shelf life and sea freight make exotic fruit more attractive for supermarkets and more affordable for the average consumer. Passion fruit is one of the examples that have become more suitable for sea freight thanks to improved protective packaging and the accuracy of controlled atmosphere.

Technologies that could be adapted to preserve perishable exotics include ethylene scavengers, oxygen scavengers, antimicrobial packaging and modified atmosphere packaging (MAP). The technological development of smart packaging has led to innovative solutions such as [NanoPack](#), an EU-funded project that will develop antimicrobial packaging solutions for perishable foods based on natural nanomaterials to reduce food waste and prevent food-borne illnesses.

Tips:

Gain further understanding of the European consumption patterns and read about [which trends offer opportunities or pose threats on the European fresh fruit and vegetables market](#) on the CBI market information platform.

Make sure you understand the [legislation on nutritional or health claims in the European Union](#) and avoid making claims that are not allowed.


See how your exotic fruit scores as a healthy product on the [Intake's Blog "75 of the healthiest fruits ranked from best to worst"](#).

Read about [Active Packaging and Intelligent Packaging for Fruits and Vegetables](#) in UK Essays.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [ICI Business](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).

Follow us for the latest updates

(opens in a new tab)  Twitter

(opens in a new tab)  Facebook

(opens in a new tab)  LinkedIn



[RSS](#)