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kings of the orchard

Don and Lionel Serimian's unforgettable Red Lion nectarines are juicy, tree-ripened, and only available at Safeway

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Red Lion nectarines are a spectacular, deep ruby red color. Right: The Serimian brothers on their farm in California's fertile Central Valley.



You've probably noticed them—the oversize, deep red nectarines with a rich, ripe aroma that calls to you from the other side of the Produce department. These are Red Lion nectarines, and they are truly as special as they appear. Carefully cultivated for the fullest possible flavor, Red Lions—which are offered exclusively in our stores from July to mid-September—are picked tree-ripened and rushed to market, often within a day or two of being harvested from the tree.

It took 10 years for brothers Don and Lionel Serimian to create the Red Lion, combining the best qualities of numerous nectarine varieties until they had something truly unique. So unique, in fact, that the variety is patented—no one else can grow the Red Lion nectarine except D & L Produce, the Selma, California, company headed by the Serimian brothers. Its orchards stretch for more than 500 acres just outside of Fresno, where the hot valley summers and frosty winters are perfect for growing stone fruit.

When they began their quest, the brothers' goal was simple: "We were going for the best nectarine possible," says Don Serimian, the

older of the two. Today, though its ancestry is top secret, the Red Lion's attributes are easy to spot. Bigger and rounder than a typical nectarine, deeper in color, and ripe in store, this is clearly a standout stone fruit. But take a bite and the Red Lion becomes absolutely unforgettable. Not only is each nectarine so juicy you need a napkin to eat it, but the fruit's flavor positively bursts in the mouth. The key? The perfect balance of sweetness and acidity, says Lionel Serimian. "It's easy to go for a nectarine that's super sweet, but you end up with a flavor that's mild and bland," he says. No chance of that with this version, which is so tasty that Produce department managers in our stores



report customers coming back year after year asking when the Red Lion nectarines will be in.

Mouthwatering taste is not the only outstanding feature of a Red Lion nectarine. Thanks to an innovative harvesting process developed in cooperation with our stores, Red Lion

Because tree-ripened fruit can bruise more easily than fruit that's picked early, Red Lion nectarines are graded, sized, and packed entirely by hand. The Serimians maintain their own packing facility right on the farm, where the delicate nectarines are washed so they cool immediately (this protects them

Nectarine trees begin to bloom pale pink blossoms in February or March; by midsummer, they are heavy with delectable, juicy fruit.

And the Serimians continue to improve the Red Lion nectarine: Recent alterations have extended the growing season so that the "Summer Lion" is available from July 5 to August 5, while the "August Lion" arrives August 10 and continues to be available until mid-September—unusually late for nectarines, which are normally considered an ephemeral summer pleasure.

One thing the Serimians don't tinker with, however, is the Red Lion's taste. "We go to all the tastings, every year, where they introduce the new varieties," says Don Serimian. "People will tell us there's a new one out there that's real good, and of course we have to try it. But we've never found a nectarine yet that tastes as good as the Red Lion."

Red Lion nectarines are handpicked daily and rushed to your Safeway

nectarines develop maximum flavor by being allowed to ripen on the tree. The soft-fleshed fruit is then carefully handpicked. "It's a much more labor-intensive process," says Lionel Serimian, adding, "We go into the fields every day to pick the Red Lions, while most farms pick only every few days."

Even more innovative is the way Red Lions are packed and shipped.

against over-ripening in the valley heat). Then the fruit is placed into specially designed trays, which guard it from being bumped or jostled in transit.

The Serimians' company is the ultimate family-run operation. The brothers are the third generation of farmers in their family; their grandfather first tilled the San Joaquin Valley's rich soil more than 100 years ago. These days, their own sons and daughters work alongside them, handling many aspects of D & L Produce's operations.