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Forbidden Fruit

By Jill Winkler

A “hot” beverage these days, pomegranate juice is lauded for its outstanding health benefits. Used for centuries in ancient cultures for medicinal purposes—the Greek physician Hippocrates is said to have used the fruit to soothe eye irritations—the pomegranate is rich in polyphenols, which are substances demonstrated to have health-promoting and disease-preventive effects:

- Pomegranate is a potent natural wrinkle fighter and natural humectant that traps moisture.
- The polyphenols loaded in pomegranate juice display antioxidant, anti-viral, and anti-tumor activity.
- Pomegranate compounds play a role in osteoarthritis and prostate health.
- The oil in pomegranate seeds can trigger apoptosis in breast cancer cells, a process that causes cancerous cells to self-destruct.
- Anti-inflammatory effects of the pomegranate may help combat hardening of the arteries.
- Antioxidants in pomegranate juice contribute to protection from obesity, diabetes type 2, hypertension and cataracts.

Now you can enjoy the health benefits of the pomegranate in a striking new wine. Delighted surprise is usually the reaction of sophisticated wine drinkers experiencing their first taste of the Sweet Carolina Pomegranate wine produced by Chatham Hill Winery. This varietal-based wine is not at all cloying or syrupy, like the fermented fruit base wines you may have tasted. Instead its acidity clears the palate. The taste sensation is not unlike biting into a cluster of juicy, ripe pomegranate.

More bouquet than taste, the fruit and varietal characteristics of the Sweet Carolina Pomegranate delivers nuance and subtlety. Most wine lovers want a great fruit balance within the first 15 seconds of tasting—and with this wine, that sensation is agreeably intensified.

The Sweet Carolina Pomegranate has its beginnings with a grape based wine, Chardonnay, after which it is infused with the natural tangy fruit juice of pomegranate. With a cranberry-cherry aroma and a peppery, zesty tartness, the wine delivers a barely sweet aftertaste. It can be outstanding as a holiday wine with your turkey dinner or glazed ham. You can serve it chilled or heat it with mulling spices.

Mix this wine with Champagne for a refreshing aperitif. Martinis flavored with Sweet Carolina Pomegranate are popular with the young urban demographic that frequents martini bars. All the Sweet Carolina blends make good introductory wines for the younger crowd. The Chatham Hill Winery draws crowds of young people to its events and wine tastings. Five young couples who initially met each other at one of these events have in fact ended up getting married. And why not? Wine and passion are linked.

An Ancient Aphrodisiac?

The sensual pomegranate harks back to ancient aphrodisiacs. The pomegranate has been a traditional symbol of fertility and womanhood dating from the Sumerians, when it bestowed power on Inanna, the goddess of love. In mythology, Persephone ate the pomegranate despite a warning from Zeus, with the result that Zeus caused her to spend fall and winter in the Underworld, during which time the earth's fertility fades away.

Was the apple the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden account? Probably not. Apples are not indigenous to the Middle East. The forbidden fruit may instead have been the pomegranate, which literally means “seeded apple” from Latin pomum (“apple”) and granatus (“seeded”).

The only producer of pomegranate infused wine in the U.S., Chatham Hill Winery produces some 6,000 cases of wine annually. It has won Best of Category in a number of national wine competitions, including gold medals from the American Wine Society’s International Wine Competition, the Grand Harvest Awards in Sonoma County and the Atlantic Seaboard Wine Competition. Established in 1999 as the first winery in the Triangle area of North Carolina, Chatham Hill Winery produces distinctive, handcrafted wines of high quality and purity from grapes grown in the state.

Just as California winemaking differs from European winemaking, North Carolina winemaking is distinctive, based on traditional winemaking methods not to be found anywhere else in the world. In the South, unless you order “unsweet,” you are usually served sweet iced tea—often called the table wine of the South. Tastes here run to the sweet. In response to demand, the winemaker at Chatham Hill Winery created his semi-sweet wines for a public whose ancestors enjoyed sweet muscadine wines. Prior to Prohibition, North Carolina was the leading wine producing state in the U.S., with most wines produced from the original native scuppernong “big white grape.” Today you will see French vinifera vines and French-American hybrids growing along with the muscadines in North Carolina. Watch out California!