



PUMP UP papaya purchases

By Brian Dey

As we steamroll through this summer, we get to work with seasonal stone fruit and a bumper crop of cherries — all summertime favorites.

One item that just might not be on that staple list is one of my favorite tropical fruits, and that's the versatile papaya. While not known as a summertime staple, the papaya is an amazing piece of fruit.

But shoppers might not be too familiar with how to select or eat them. This is where your skilled merchandising and customer education becomes the key cog in the success of selling papaya.

PAPAYA PUNCH

Make your papaya displays powerful and the center of attention within your departments. Be bold and build a can't-miss display for your customers to see in a high-traffic area. I am a firm believer in the proven successes of larger displays

selling a lot of fruit, but also remember that smaller displays can still make a big impact with your customers.

Waterfalls, standalone displays and simply opening up the fruit in your regular tropical sections are great ways to add papaya exposure. Cut and overwrap halves of riper papayas to place on your displays to show your customer the inside flesh. This will give them a view of what's in store for them when they cut it at home.

TROPICAL TIES

As a tropical fruit, papayas tie in well with other commodities in this fast-growing category. Items such as mangoes, pineapples, kiwi and dragon fruit can all be merchandised together to create a tropical destination for your customers. Even so, papayas also tie in nicely with berries and citrus, so other places in produce can work.

On the grocery side, tie-ins such as brown sugar, black pepper and cayenne pepper will offer shoppers ideas and add impulse sales. One of my favorite snacks is papaya sprinkled with chili powder or Tajin, red pepper flakes and a spray of fresh lime juice.

RIPE OR UNRIPE? YES!

People enjoy eating papaya ripe and unripe, like many other tropical fruits such as bananas, mangoes and

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avocados. Offer both unripe and ripe papayas on your displays when possible to net the best sales results.

While papaya might be new to some, regular consumers of the fruit like myself will often want a ripe papaya to eat soon after purchase.

When this isn't possible, it's a good idea to educate your shoppers on when the papaya is ripe and how to ripen it at home. Simple signage on your counter with some larger paper bags on display will be a good start to the ripening journey. It might be a good idea also to develop an in-store ripening program, similar to bananas and avocados, to ensure that you will have ripe fruit ready for your customers.

FRESH CUTS, FRESH SALES

Papaya, especially in the summertime months, is a great item to have in your cut-fruit sections, both by itself and in mixes with other tropical fruit, such as mango or kiwi. This adds variety to your cut walls and would be a great introduction to a new consumer who has never tried them.

Simply scooping papayas with a melon baller is an easy way to get these into cut-fruit cups. You can also cut papayas in half, cut three slices of limes and place over the seeds in the cavity of the fruit, and overwrap. This will be a nice grab-and-go option for someone looking for a healthy snack for lunch. Note: Keep the seeds within the cavity, as some shoppers will eat the seeds for the health benefits that they offer.

Go one step further and band a wrapped spoon on your fruit for additional customer convenience.



VERSATILITY

Papayas are a nutritional powerhouse that's so versatile. Not only is papaya a refreshing fruit when eaten plain and raw, it's great in salads and smoothies. Use papaya as a topper for ice cream and other desserts. Puree it for homemade jams.

There are many options for this (sometimes) oddly shaped cylindrical fruit lurking in the tropical section. The papaya is a true hidden gem with many upsides for increased sales in the tropical category.

It's just about getting your consumer to try them. Be sure to include recipe suggestions at the point of sale to give your shoppers ideas on how to use fresh papaya. **pmg**



Brian Dey, senior merchandiser and natural stores coordinator with Ephrata, Pa.-based Four

Seasons Produce, is a multiple winner of Best Produce Merchandiser and several commodity categories in PMG's Produce Artist Award Series, a seasonal merchandising contest. He's led seminars on merchandising at produce conferences and served as a guest judge in the display contest.