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The Bronte Pistachio

(Pistacchio Verde di Bronte)

By JOE SANO

Pistachios need police protection! That's "nuts"!

It's not because they were "a salted"! Sorry! Brought to its shore centuries ago by Muslim invaders, Sicily is home to the world's most-prized variety of the pistachio nut, the Pistacchio Verde di Bronte or the green pistachio from Bronte. Centered in the town of Bronte, a small town in northeastern Sicily in the province of Catania, the pistachio trees grow across some 7,400 acres on the slopes of Mt. Etna, an active volcano.

The green pistachios produced in the town of Bronte are among the most expensive in the world. They are often called Sicily's green gold, green for their color, gold for their value. One kilogram (2.2lb) of the seeds, unshelled, typically costs 15.50 euros (\$17.40) or more than double the price of pistachios from the world's two giant producers, the US and Iran.

Given the lucrative nature of the crop, it attracts a continuing problem during harvesting time – thieves. In 2009, thieves stole 300 kilos of Bronte pistachios during harvest time (more than 5,000 euros worth at today's prices). These criminals

turn up in cars in the dead of night and try to make off with as many pistachios as they can. This led the mayor of Bronte to request that the police do more to protect the crop in this secluded rural area. This resulted in the Carabinieri, Italy's paramilitary police force, introducing helicopter as well as ground patrols to prevent armed pistachio thieves from stealing a product worth millions of dollars.

What is so special about the Bronte pistachio? The plant is of Persian origin with an intense emerald color and grows up to six meters in height. Bronte produces 1% of the world's output, 80% of which is sold outside of Italy. The pistachio tree has a short and bulky trunk, like a fig tree. It can live as long as 300 years and develops very slowly. It becomes productive only after 10 years. These pistachios are exceptionally precious because the trees in this region are picked only every other year; on the off years, farmers discard the newly formed fruit to give the tree a chance to rest and recuperate nutrients.

Incredibly sweet and fruity with a meaty consistency and astounding emerald hue, it's no wonder that pistachios from Bronte are called green gold.



These emerald beauties have deep-purple skins and are longer and thinner in shape than other pistachios. Many believe the secret's in the volcanic soil of

Mount Etna. Laws and regulations state that the trees are never fertilized or irrigated and the nuts must be hand-harvested by shaking the fruit off every other year.

These nuts are high in fat content with a fragrant and lightly salted taste and notes of resin and a mineral base due to the lava enriched ground on which it grows. They are prized the world over for their pure, delicate flavor and exceptional color. You won't find another pistachio with this appearance.



Between late August and early September of the harvest year, a harvesting process that involves the entire population of Bronte begins. Women, men, the old and the young ascend the heights to shake, pick, shell and then dry this splendid fruit by hand. They are exposed to the Sicilian sun for three days, and each sunset are removed to protect them from the humidity of the night. The seeds are then stocked in warehouses before going to the local factories to be processed. This manual labor intense and time consuming process is the culmination of two years of work condensed into 30 days which adds to the price.

Once harvested, they are made into countless products for local and international markets. Bronte pistachios are delicious eaten raw right

out of the bag. Some prefer to lightly toast them in a pan to release their essential oils and intensify their flavor and toss them into salads or use them in a unique pesto sauce. They are used in the confectionary industry for cakes, pastries, torrone, mousses, confections, and ice creams. They are also used in meat stuffing inside arancini, Sicilian stuffed rice balls, and even in the cosmetics industry.



Cannoli filled with pistachio cream



'Gelato con brioche'

These iridescent gems are engrained in the history and culture of Sicily and it doesn't take long to realize that pistachios are infused in the very fiber of Sicilian culture and cuisine. To this point, the Bronte pistachio obtained European Union P.D.O.(Protected Designation of Origin) certification in 2009. The P.D.O. Label establishes the rules and regulations regarding the exact area of cultivation (i.e. the Sicilian Commune of Bronte), and production, harvesting and labeling practices thus protecting not only the product but the consumer too. To make sure you're getting the real deal, look for the D.O.P. label and be prepared to spend around \$4 to \$5 an ounce. They're not called "Green Gold" for nothing!

