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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.