

Locally Grown Fruits Latest Trend in Spa Treatment

By **JACOB ADELMAN** Associated Press Writer

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Visitors have long flocked to the hilly Southern California hamlet of Ojai to get stuffed with the Pixie tangerines grown as a specialty in the area's citrus groves.

Now they're going to get scrubbed with them too.

The Ojai Valley Inn and other spas across the country are cashing in on the craze for locally grown fruits and herbs by integrating them into skin treatments and massage therapies.

Customers say they like knowing they're supporting small, local farms and appreciate the freshness of the items used.

"When they put this stuff on, I can smell fresh juice," said Ojai Valley Inn guest Julia Pizzinat, 70, who had the 50-minute, \$145 Pixie Tangerine & Pomegranate Scrub, which uses halved tangerines as applicators for a sugar-based exfoliant. "It's not like something that's been made in Milwaukee and sent out in crates."

Guests' greatest demand used to be for treatments employing exotic ingredients from far-off places, such as heavily perfumed body creams from Europe, spa managers said. But over the past few years, the local food movement firmly entrenched in the nation's pricier restaurants has spread to spas.

Treatments using products from local farms are a niche offering, so their sales haven't been separately tracked. But spa managers say guests are increasingly opting for such luxuries.

Atlanta-based spa consultant Mark Wuttke said demand is being driven by a desire for a unique experience tied to a spa's location.

"People are looking for a more authentic experience," he said. "People don't necessarily want to have the same experience in Florida as they have in New York as they have in California as they have in Dubai."

He cautioned, however, that spas using locally grown ingredients risk disappointing guests who expect to get the same services year-round. Most crops grow only part of the year.

"There are seasonal variations," Wuttke said. "I can offer it today, but if you come

back in six months' time, you might not be able to have that because it's no longer available."

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Emily Walker, who manages the Spa Hotel Healdsburg in California's Sonoma County, said using local ingredients fits with the ethos already embraced by many wine country visitors.

One of her spa's treatments features a salve of wine and honey from the nearby Quivara Vineyards. Another uses a massage oil made with the same locally grown Meyer lemons found on the spa restaurant's menu.

"We sort of carried it over because the climate here in wine country is 'farm-to-table,'" Walker said. "So now it's 'farm-to-spa.'"

The Aspira Spa in eastern Wisconsin, meanwhile, designed some of its treatments around the elderberries that grow naturally on the surrounding plains, but not in great enough quantity to make all the ointments and creams slathered on guests.

The spa had been importing elderberries from a farm in the Pacific Northwest, but recently contracted with the nearby Stoney Meadow organic farm to grow the berries, along with lavender, rosemary and other herbs, said Lola Roeh, general manager of the Osthoff Resort in Elkhart Lake, which houses the spa. A 65-minute Elderberry Facial there costs \$190.

"In the restaurant, our pork comes from a farm that's 10 miles away. Our beef comes from another nearby organic farm," Roeh said. "This is really part of the whole resort."

Stoney Meadow owner Andrea Levsen said spa sales are helping her business, which she otherwise runs on a community supported agriculture model, in which consumers pay upfront for regular shipments of produce during the growing season.

"I think it does aid the CSA mission," Levsen said. "The mission of the CSA was to help families be healthier, to help families have access to healthier food. (The spa business) allows us to put more money into the farm here."

At Friend's Ranches in Ojai, which began selling Pixie tangerines to the Ojai Valley Inn this spring, the owners were surprised to find their fruit was being used in spa treatments.

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"I thought it was kind of silly," said Emily Ayala, who owns the farm with her family. "As a farmer, you're growing food and sometimes you think it's wasteful when people don't use your food to eat. I didn't know that people rub themselves with a tangerine."

But that skepticism turned to delight when online orders for the Pixies spiked.

"It gave us another level of exposure with customers who otherwise might not have tried the tangerine," Ayala said.

Online:

Ojai Valley Inn: <http://www.ojairesort.com/>

Spa Hotel Healdsburg: <http://www.hotelhealdsburg.com/>

Aspira Spa: <http://www.aspiraspa.com/>

(This version CORRECTS the location of Aspira Spa to eastern Wisconsin, not western.)

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