

Meet the producers

'Quinoa took us by surprise – and the growers too'

These days it's on all the trendiest restaurant menus, and never far from the lips of healthy-eating gurus – but quinoa comes from surprisingly humble origins

This month, in the Puno area of Peru, high up in the Andes, they're getting ready for the harvest: the fields are awash with colour from plants as tall as a person, with feathery seedheads in violet, crimson, orange and yellow. They look as though they've been grown for the expensive end of the floristry trade – but this is quinoa, the South American plant that's gone from peasant staple to foodie favourite, star of all the hottest cookery books, and most mispronounced ingredient of the century (it's keen-wah, not quin-oh-a).

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'Often thought of as a grain, quinoa is actually the seed of a plant that grows in conditions where other plants would die'

give up and die: 'It tolerates very thin oxygen, salty soils, night-time frost and daytime temperatures of more than 40°C,' says Andrew Ciclitera of Demos, which imports the quinoa for our Love Life range, 'which is probably one reason why it was traditionally something poor people grew and ate.'

What propelled quinoa to its new superstar status was that this undemanding plant packs a nutritional punch. It's a plant source of complete protein as it contains the full range of amino acids our bodies need. It is also a source of fibre and can be used by those avoiding gluten. 'It's versatile,' says Andrew. 'You can use it in salads, or as a replacement for rice or couscous, and because it has quite a



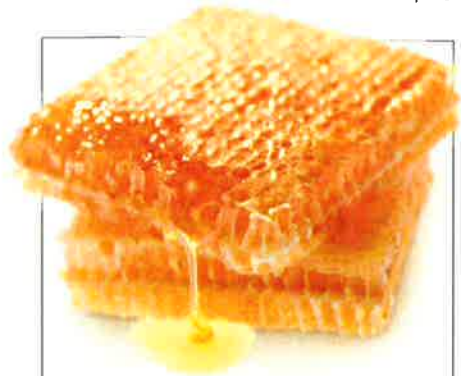
SEEDS OF LOVE Andrew Ciclitera imports Peruvian quinoa for the Love Life range

mild taste, it's very good at soaking up other flavours.'

Once harvested, cleaned and dried, the quinoa is shipped via the Panama Canal to Felixstowe, finally arriving at the Demos factory in Essex – an Aladdin's cave of global foods, from Australian sultanas to Canadian lentils and Chinese kidney beans. Despite decades of experience in the trade,

Andrew says the rise of quinoa took him by surprise: 'We only started with it eight years ago, and every year, the demand's gone up. I think it's come as quite a surprise to the people out there too, that something they've been eating for hundreds of years has suddenly become so popular here. But they're delighted to find a new market – and it's great that it's sustaining their lifestyle.'

Photography: Dylan Thomas



What's hot HONEY

Seeing the bees busily collecting nectar to make honey is one of the most enchanting sights of spring and summer. But these days bees are also seriously big business. Sales of honey, worth £109.8 million, overtook jam last year for the first time, according to *The Grocer*

Squeeze for ease

essential Waitrose Squeezy Honey, £2.27/454g

No more waiting for that golden nectar to roll off the spoon in its own sweet time with this flexible bottle.



Mexican ap-peel

Waitrose Orange Blossom Honey, £2.99/340g

Placing the hives in the orange groves of Mexico ensures strong citrus notes and an attractive amber colour



Can we have some moor?

Waitrose Scottish Heather Honey, £5.49/340g
The bees take full advantage of the summer swathes of Scottish heather to create a rich honey with a deep caramel taste



Double-digit honey

Rowse Manuka Honey 15+, £19.99/250g

New Zealand's offering has a cult following, and is acclaimed by health bloggers. The 15+ rating refers to its UMF (unique manuka factor), so the higher the number the better



See our Planting For Bees pull-out in this issue

The decoder

A device capable of converting food terms into ordinary language

What is aquaponics?



Aquaponics – sounds like a new Olympic sport perhaps? Not quite, although the site of the UK's first aquaponic farm in Beckton is not a million miles away from the 2012 Olympic Park in Hackney, east London. **Tell us more.** GrowUp Urban Farms has been given planning permission to convert an old warehouse to grow salad and herbs, and farm tilapia fish. It already owns a number of shipping containers housing aquaponic farms (left)

Why bother when we have access to those things anyway? The company hopes that growing plants under LED lighting using a nutrient-rich solution from the fish tanks (known as aquaponics) will provide a sustainable way of feeding people in cities. Produce grows all year round, and it has a smaller environmental impact than conventional methods. **That's pretty impressive.** It is. To learn more you can go to the visitor centre at the farm when it opens later this year.