



Good Living - Sydney Morning Herald

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in season



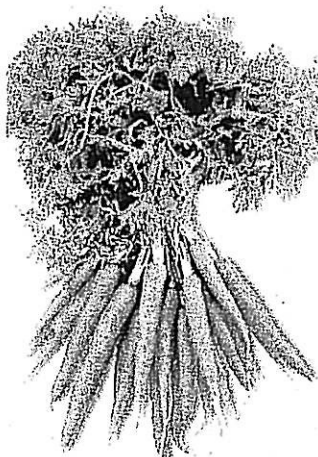
ROBIN POWELL

Almonds

Almonds flowered last August, spent the summer ripening into nuts and, for the past couple of weeks, have been trembled from the trees by machine shakers and swept up from the ground to be taken to processing and packing sheds. In NSW, they are grown in the Riverina. You can buy in-shell nuts, for which you'll need a nutcracker (or an artfully wielded pestle) as there is no easy way into a hard-shelled almond. Or you can buy packaged, shelled nuts. While there is no requirement to put a "harvested on" date on packaged nuts, all Australian nuts sold from this month are likely to be sweet and fresh, as last year's crop was a sell-out.

Quinces

Quinces are an ancient fruit, cultivated for more than 4000 years. We only eat them cooked, but the Roman writer, Pliny the Elder, refers to a variety that was good eaten raw, suggesting either we've lost some sweeter varieties, or the ancients were less particular about bitter, tannic and sour fruits. The season is just beginning and quinces will be available well into spring, as



they store well. To turn quinces sweet, cook them with $\frac{1}{4}$ of a cup of sugar for each quince. The longer and slower they cook the redder and richer they become.

WAYS WITH QUINCES

Make a quince paste to serve with cheese by washing, peeling, quartering and coring four quinces. Put in a pan, cover with water and simmer until completely soft. Push through a sieve then weigh the puree and add an equal weight of sugar. Dissolve the sugar in the puree over a low heat, then boil, stirring often until it is thick, dark-red, and pulling away from the sides of the pan. Spread it flat in a lined lamington tray, then dry in a fan-forced oven with the fan on but no heat. Store in an airtight container in the fridge.

Dutch carrots

Dutch carrots are sold in bunches with their leafy green tops still attached and are sometimes called baby carrots. They are not immature specimens plucked early from the ground but small versions of a fully-grown carrot. Dutch carrots are sweet and well-coloured because they are grown from seed developed to grow small roots in high-density plantings. Why dutch? No one seems to know. Carrots hail from Afghanistan but have been a part of the Western vegetable palette for a few thousand years. Perhaps the variety is named for the Dutch as their country is a leader in seed selection and new variety development, or perhaps it's just because Holland's national colour is orange.