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Le Vie della Zagara: Ciaculli and its Anti-Mafia Mandarins

Posted on 2015/05/04 by tikichris



First stop on [Le Vie della Zagara](#) was the Palermo suburb of Ciaculli, home of the juicy *Mandarino Tardivo di Ciacualli*, where land once owned by the Mafia has been confiscated and converted into citrus groves by the locally run [Consorzio il Tardivo di Ciaculli](#).

Legend has it that Mafiosi messing with the local water supply around the groves of Ciacualli back in the 1940s inadvertently created the right conditions to produce the *Mandarino Tardivo di Ciacualli* (“late” mandarin grown in the area around Ciaculli) when mandarins far superior to those grown earlier in the year started fruiting later in the season than was believed to be possible.

Mandarino Tardivo trees flower between March and June. Fruiting is from January to March. So I got a good whiff of the blossoms during this press trip but wasn’t there for fruit picking. I was able to have a taste of some of the last of the latest harvest though and found the fruits to be just as described and a lot better than most mandarins I’ve tasted. I also had the pleasure of enjoying a sip or two of the local *mandarinello* (like limoncello but made with mandarins) – it’s a super refreshing drink!

Tardivo mandarins are known for their thin skins, making them difficult to handle and to ship. So if you come across them in a shop, they’ll probably be priced a little higher than other mandarins. Juicier, sweeter and with fewer seeds than typical mandarins, I reckon it would be worth paying a bit more money to give them a try.



Much of my day in Ciaculli was spent at production facilities for the Consorzio il Tardivo di Ciaculli, where the consortium's president Giovanni D'Agati showed me and the rest of the media gang around. He was proud (and rightly so) to explain that Ciaculli's late season mandarins are certified PGI (IGP in Italian) and have [protected geographical status](#) similar to other area specific products like Parmigiano-Reggiano and Champagne. G'Agati also pointed out that his consortium is part of the [Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity](#) and that its products are "[pizzo free](#)" meaning the consortium does not make extortion payments to organised crime.

When mandarins are not in harvest, the consortium shifts its focus to other citrus fruits such as lemons and medlars.



A lavish and largely vegetarian lunch (one of the yummiest during my time in Sicily) was hosted by the consortium at [MandarInArte](#), a cooperative tasked with converting ex-Mafia land into sites for sustainable tourism projects. Whoever does the cooking for this cooperative is a genius! Our lunch featured foraged wild

herbs, homemade cheese (ricotta!) and breads and a wealth of traditional dishes made with fresh veggies and plenty of sweets.



Please keep an eye out for more juicy tales in my [Le Vie della Zagara](#) series of posts. Grazie. And when shopping in Sicily, look for the “PizzoFree” or “Addiopizzo” symbol.



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