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### The Mango Slurp Fest

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Yellow mangoes were on sale in Oakland Chinatown this week by the box, at bargain prices of around \$7. They reminded me of a childhood ritual I loved: the Mango Slurp Fest.

In the 1960s, when I was growing up, much of the exotic produce we take for granted today was not available in the markets. This was a sad realization for my immigrant parents, who loved nothing more than a ripe mango. Then, my dad and uncle decided to take matters into their own hands, and ordered one case of Filipino mangoes from a produce vendor willing to take the order.

When the mangoes arrived in their wooden crate, my dad brought them home and put them in the basement. My sister and I were not allowed to peek. The box was to sit there in the dark, with the mangoes wrapped individually in tissues, and slowly, each would ripen. I would sneak downstairs to smell the flowery tropical perfume that got stronger with each passing day. My dad would inspect them daily, turning the mangoes over, gently pressing on the flesh and smelling them.

Finally, on the appointed day, my dad decided that enough mangoes were ripe. He called over my aunt and uncle. My mother spread the dining room table with newspaper and we all sat down. Then, my dad arrived with his golden treasures, and ceremoniously plopped them on the table.

The mangoes were beautiful: fragrant, soft, kidney-shaped, some wrinkled, some with dotted black spots signifying over-ripeness. We didn't care. We cut into them and exposed their brilliant golden orange flesh. Their heady scent filled the room. Then, with the newspaper catching our drips, our group ate them one after another, slurping them down and smacking our lips. The silky flesh was like a ripe peach, only firmer, tangier, sweeter and more fragrant. We sucked the meat out from around the pits, wasting nothing. We ate as many as we wanted. Finally, we all leaned back contentedly, covered with sticky juice.

My parents repeated the slurp fest each year, until mangoes were finally available in the markets. Today, I can't pass a yellow mango without remembering the smells and tastes of that event. I exercised restraint and bought only four last weekend. And then two more. And then two more, although there are only two of us at home to enjoy them.

If you would like your own mango slurp fest, you can buy mangoes in the markets from now to September. Round mangoes usually start out green, moving to yellow with lovely red mottling. The kind we had were flatter and yellow. Put your mangoes in a paper bag to ripen at room temperature.

When ripe (you can tell by the smell and softness), hold the mango upright and carve down along each side of the long, flat seed that traverses its length. Don't try to peel mangoes first -- they'll be so slippery that you'll be chasing them all over the kitchen counter. And don't bother with embellishment -- just get out your spoon and dig into the two golden halves. It just doesn't get any better.