



One interesting thing about Stokes Purple sweet potatoes is they have more antioxidants than blueberries.

*“Eat one fruit a day that scares you. If you do that, you’re going to find something you really like.”*

*— Alex Berkley, Frieda’s Specialty Produce*

# A Match Made in Haven

Frieda's Specialty Produce pairs with a creative  
Old Towne Orange institution.

*Haven Gastropub*  
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[havengastropub.com](http://havengastropub.com)

*Frieda's Specialty Produce, [friedas.com](http://friedas.com)*

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There's a tray of gnocchi in Haven Gastropub's skinny kitchen. Newly appointed Executive Chef Craig Brady has arranged them in rows of near-military precision. The Italian dumplings are bite-size, plump and tightly packed — like proper gnocchi should be — and they're purple.

Gnocchi normally isn't purple. It's also not normally made with Stokes Purple sweet potatoes. But Brady's deviated from the Old Towne Orange restaurant's routine. So on this particular day, the gnocchi takes on an otherworldly appearance from the root vegetable's deep hue. The oddly shaded veggies come courtesy of Frieda's, the Los Alamitos-based specialty produce company known for celebrating unique fruits and vegetables — some of which look like they could come from another planet.

Frieda's has been rewarding those who boldly go where practically no palate has gone before since 1962, the year Frieda Rapoport Caplan launched her semi-eponymous company and introduced a strangely brown fuzzy item called kiwifruit to the masses. The fruit's mainstream success makes it symbolic of the company's aspiration to change the way the country eats, and it serves as a reminder that achieving such lofty goals takes time. "It took about 18 years for kiwifruit to flourish in the marketplace," says Sales Manager Alex Berkley, who is also Caplan's granddaughter. "But Frieda's kept with it until people caught on. Now look at it — it's everywhere!"

Some half-century after Caplan's initial foray into specialty produce, Frieda's reputation for being a trusted purveyor of edible unorthodoxy has become equally ubiquitous. "When people learn about a fruit or vegetable they've never heard of before, they come to us," Berkley notes.

"We feel that one of the reasons they do this is because we're passionate about every item we sell. Before we put anything out on the market, we'll cut into it, eat it and play around with it, just to make sure it's worthy enough to share with our customers."

There are plenty of options for people to consider. The Stokes Purple sweet potato is one of more than 200 the company has introduced to America (they now market more than 500). The Stokes Purple sweet potato, for instance, has a richer flavor than regular sweet potatoes and a texture Brady refers to as "fudgy" because it's "pleasant, thick and dense, but not too tacky or gummy." Brady's understanding of these characteristics is necessary in order to effectively use the starch, or any other strange-looking produce Frieda's may throw his way. "When you get a weird ingredient, you need to boil it down to its basics," he says. "Once you learn about its roots, you can use it to build a dish that's familiar and not something so out-of-the-box it turns customers off."

His familiarity with Frieda's unusually colored sweet potato translates into robust, tender cylinders of vibrantly purple gnocchi with a nuanced sweetness that adds depth to a concentrated earthiness. They're delightful on their own, and they're made downright diabolical when he pairs them with a lobster, Champagne and caviar butter sauce for a new winter menu item. The dish is as decadent as it is visually striking. It's also the type of creative offering Haven's regulars anticipate seeing. "Our customers have come to expect interesting stuff from us," he explains. "We don't go into weird-for-weirdness'-sake territory, but playing around is something we definitely like to do. I think people would be disappointed if we became simple."