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Mango Melee Brings Fierce Competition, Sweet Victories, and a New Queen of the Mangoes to St. Croix

This year's Mango Melee drew mango lovers of all ages to St. George Village Botanical Garden, where the Valencia Pride variety of *Mangifera indica* claimed the crown, and reigning youth champ Arianna Sage outpaced adult competitors in eating glory.

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Mango Melee 2025 at the St. George Botanical Garden on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Every summer, St. Croix becomes a mecca for mango lovers with the annual Mango Melee. This past Sunday, mango enthusiasts of all ages gathered at the St. George Village Botanical Garden in Frederiksted to immerse themselves in all things *mangifera indica*.

Of course, apart from the vendor booths and educational activities, the highlight of Mango Melee is the mango-eating competition, and this year's fierce fracas did not disappoint.

Ten contestants, clad in plastic ponchos to protect their clothing, took part in the adult competition, each trying to eat their 10 allotted mangoes in the fastest time. After about 5 minutes, Azzem Byrd emerged as winner, tipping the stainless steel bowl back to drink the last of the mango juice within as the mango-seed counter tried to confirm his victory.

Meanwhile, Arianna Sage once again proved herself the fastest mango-eater of the 12 and under crowd. The reigning champion demonstrated excellent technique as she dispatched mango after mango with rapid precision. "You didn't eat your porridge this morning?" the incredulous host asked when realizing that Sage was on her third mango when all other contestants were still grappling with their first fruit. The young mango lover finished in even less time than her adult counterpart: the race was over in around three and a half minutes.

The other much-anticipated component of the annual mango festival is the vote for Queen of the Mangoes, an effort to find St. Croix's favorite mango each year. Attendees are given the opportunity to conduct a blind taste-test of five different varieties, and vote on which mango they believe is best. This year, in a landslide victory, the Valencia Pride variety was named Queen, with the Irwin Mango a distant second.

As the day dedicated to all things mango came to an end, contestants and attendees went home to reflect on the fruit which shares the trajectory of much of the territory's history and heritage; a transplant from across the water that, in time, came to call the Caribbean its home.