

# The Cherry Festival in Kyustendil – a symbol of Bulgarian fruit growing

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*Cherry orchards in the Kyustendil region existed even before the Liberation from Ottoman rule. It is no coincidence that the region is called the “Orchard” of Bulgaria, where fruit growing has always been not only an important livelihood for the population, but also a tradition passed down from generation to generation. Over the years, the Kyustendil region has become the main producer of sweet cherry fruit in the country and for 14 years now has been showcasing the abundance of its cultivars at the Cherry Festival, held in the second half of June. During the three festive days more than 100 sweet cherry cultivars were presented.*

At the time of the Liberation, the Kyustendil region was renowned for its fruit orchards, and fruit growing constituted an important livelihood for the population. For the first time in the country, from 13 to 15 September

1896, a Fruit Growing and Beekeeping Competition was held. Since then, the region has been known by the designations – „Cradle of Bulgarian Fruit Growing”, „Orchard of Bulgaria”, „First Fruit-Growing Centre of the Country”.

Cherry orchards in the Kyustendil region existed even before the Liberation from Ottoman rule. At the first agricultural census in the region in 1897, there were over 13,000 decares of fruit orchards, which amounted to 27% of the total orchard area in the country. The main fruit species at that time was the plum, with over 73% of the total area. After 1908, the area under sweet cherry orchards increased rapidly and by 1911 already occupied 339 decares. The sweet cherry became one of the significant fruit species for the region, ranking third in the overall statistics of fruit production. The cherry orchards were concentrated mainly on the southern slopes of the Konyavska Mountain, on part of the foothills of Kraishte and to a lesser extent on the eastern slopes of Osogovo. They occupied mainly non-irrigated and sloping terrains in the district.

Today, the Kyustendil region is one of the main producers of sweet cherry fruit, with 16,000 decares of orchards, providing a livelihood for the local population. For this reason, the sweet cherry is increasingly recognised as a symbol and emblem of Kyustendil.



## Cherry Festival

For the 14th consecutive year, Kyustendil Municipality and the Institute of Agriculture – Kyustendil (IA-Kyustendil) organised the Cherry Festival. The three consecutive days during which the festival was held encompassed the productive, taste and artistic qualities of the Kyustendil sweet cherry. The focus of the festival was the presentation of promising sweet cherry cultivars for the country and the region.





As every year, the event attracted great interest, both from residents of Kyustendil and from visitors to the town. During the festival, IA – Kyustendil presented more than 100 sweet cherry cultivars.



The first day of the festival began with demonstration painting by young artists, an entertaining workshop for making cherries, a free photo mirror and delicious Kyustendil sweet cherries for tasting.

A market of Kyustendil sweet cherries and an exhibition of artisans and producers was held.

At the end of the evening, the musical formation Deep Zone Project and DJ Dian Solo took care of the good mood of those present.

The official opening took place on the second day of the festival in Kyustendil, and immediately afterwards the promising sweet cherry cultivars for the country and the region were presented by IA – Kyustendil. Community centres, mayoralities, associations and agricultural producers took part with exhibition tables, arranged figures and interesting compositions with cherries.

A competition was held for the largest cherry, the most attractive display rack, the most original panel and the most beautiful cherry stand.





The prize for the largest cherry – 36 millimetres, was won by the community centre (Chitalishte) „Hristo Botev“ in the village of Piperkov Chiflik and the community centre „Prosveta“ in the village of Granitsa.





The most attractive display rack was deemed to be that of the community centre „Hristo Botev 1948“ in the village of Piperkov Chiflik. Second place went to the Home for Elderly People with Physical Disabilities „Ilyo Voyvoda“.



The prize for the most original panel was awarded to – the community centre „Slavcho Temkin 1911“ in the village of Dragovishtitsa (1st place) and the community centre „Spasovitsa 2008“ in the village of Nikolichevtsi (2nd place).



For the most beautiful cherry stand, the judges determined, in order of ranking, the following winners: the community centre „Probuda 1919” in the village of Kopilovtsi, the community centre „Otec Paisiy 1928” in the village of Bagrentsi, the community centre „Saglasie 2007” in the village of Zhabokrut, the community centre „Prosveta 1988” in the village of Girchevtsi, the community centre „Prosveta 1922” in the village of Slokoshtitsa, the community centre „Slavcho Temkin 1911” in the village of Dragovishtitsa.

At midday, the professional brass band of Kyustendil Municipality gave a festive concert with special guests – the young dancers from the National School of Dance Art, Sofia. For the visitors to the town, the Regional Historical Museum in Kyustendil organised two free sightseeing tours with licensed guides. Throughout the day, entertaining workshops and art studios amused the young visitors to the festival. The festive programme concluded with a performance by the band „Fondatsiyata” (“The Foundation”).





The third day of the festival continued with the culinary competition – „Cherries in the Kitchen“ with guest host Dragomir Draganov. During the day, competitive games with cherries were held for children and adults. At midday, young talents from the town and the country sang and danced.

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