

Citrus Fruit

Christmas held many surprises for my brother and me as youngsters. One thing, however, was always constant. There would be an orange in the toe of our stockings on Christmas morning. If we were lucky, there might even be a tangerine or two, which were my brother's favorites.

The winter days are cold, windy, and snowy in our part of the county but we can count on some "sunshine fruits" or citrus fruits to be available. It is not surprising that Florida is the number one citrus state, producing 70% of the U.S. crop. California, Arizona, and Texas also grow citrus fruits. So while we say they are "in season" now, most varieties are available year-round.

Citrus fruits are a wide category of edible fruits that includes oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes, and tangerines. They are rich in Vitamin C and while many of us consume the juice form, eating the fruit provides needed fiber. Most citrus fruits are first peeled, then the pulp is eaten. Remember to always wash fresh fruit, even when you will peel it.

The colored outermost skin layer of citrus fruits, the zest, is highly perfumed and frequently used to flavor many dishes. Be sure when grating or zesting the fruit, to avoid getting any of the white underlayer, the pith, which is bitter.

The largest fruit of the citrus group is grapefruit, which is available in three color categories of white, pink and red. It is believed that the grapefruit grew as a mutation from the pummelo tree. Generally grapefruit range in size from four to six inches, and come with or without seeds. All grapefruit have a similar tangy-sweet flavor and are very juicy. There are slight differences in the flavor and juiciness among the varieties but the nutritional difference is significant. All colors of grapefruit are excellent sources of vitamin C, potassium, and dietary fiber but the pink and red varieties contain significantly larger amounts of vitamin A than the white.

There is one caution about grapefruit. If you drink grapefruit juice regularly, you might want to ask your health care provider or pharmacist about its possible interaction with any medications you may be taking or any new drugs that are added.

Oranges fall into three main categories: sweet, sour and loose-skinned. Most of the oranges grown in the United States are sweet, with familiar names such as Navel and Valencia. Florida is the number one producer of oranges in the US but 90% the crop is used for juice.

Most oranges have a yellow orange color with sizes ranging from small to large. The inside of an orange is plump and juicy.

Citrus fruit should be firm and heavy for its size. Look for glossy, smooth skin in grapefruits and fine-textured oranges. Keep in mind that skin color might not be a good guide to quality. Avoid fruits that have soft spots.

I like to add oranges and grapefruit to salads, either a green salad or with other fruits. To cut either fruit into sections, peel it first; then slide the knife along one of the sections to the center. Slice down the other side of that section on the inside of the membrane and the section will slide out. Gently slice just on the other side of the membrane, exposing another segment. Once you have enough room to work, you can slide the knife up from the center to free the sections. Be sure to do this over a bowl to catch the juice. If the grapefruit is large, I sometimes cut it in half before sectioning.

The loose-skinned types of oranges are often called mandarins. You might be more used to seeing these available in small cans. One type of mandarin orange is the tangerine. The name is derived from Tangier(s), Morocco, the port from which they were first shipped to Europe. The fruit is recognizable by the slightly flattened ends. The tangerine is simple to peel and inside, the juicy segments separate easily.

Tiny clementines are a newer addition to the American grocery. They grow in Spain and North Africa and are sold by the case in small wooden crates. Available usually in the early months of the year, clementines are light orange-colored and largely seedless. Because of their tender skin they are highly perishable. Examine the stem ends and make sure they are not softened before purchase.

These are just a few of the types of citrus fruits available locally. Explore the produce section of your favorite market for new-to-you varieties, or hope for one in your Christmas stocking.

Ambrosia

3 oranges, peeled and sectioned	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 small grapefruits, peeled and sectioned	2 8-ounce containers fat-free lemon yogurt
1/2 cup orange marmalade	2 tablespoons shredded coconut

Combine sectioned fruit in medium bowl. Add marmalade and vanilla and stir gently to coat all citrus sections. Spoon equal amount into 4 glasses or fruit bowls. Spoon 4 ounces of lemon yogurt (about half of one container) on top of each portion and top with shredded coconut. Chill for 20-30 minutes before serving.

Chicken and Fruit Salad

1 lb. roasted chicken breast	2 apples, diced
1 bunch of spinach, divided	1/3 c. fat-free Dijon salad dressing
2 grapefruit	

Remove and discard skin from chicken and tear chicken into bite-sized pieces. Chop 1 cup spinach leaves into small pieces. Set remaining leaves aside. Remove peel from grapefruit, tear into sections, and cut into small pieces. In a large bowl, combine chicken, chopped spinach, fruit, and salad dressing. Stir gently. To serve, place remaining spinach leaves on a large plate; top with chicken mixture.

Yield: 4 servings

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 380, Total Fat 5 g; Saturated Fat 2 g; Cholesterol 95 m; Sodium 380 mg; Total Carbohydrate 45 g; Dietary Fiber 6 g; Sugars 32 g; Protein 40 g; Vitamin A 190%, Vitamin C 130%, Calcium 15%, Iron 20%.

Citrus Salad with Avocado

3 corn tortillas	2 tablespoons honey
4 oranges	2 tablespoons raspberry vinegar
4 grapefruit	1 avocado, peeled and sliced

Preheat oven to 225°F. Slice corn tortillas into thin strips. Place strips on a baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Grate orange peel into 4 tablespoons of orange rind. Peel oranges and grapefruit and tear into sections. In a large bowl, mix honey, raspberry vinegar, and orange and grapefruit sections. Add grated orange rind and tortilla strips. Mix all ingredients together gently. Top with avocado slices.

Yield: 6 servings

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 200, Total Fat 6 g; Saturated Fat 1 g; Sodium 10 mg; Total Carbohydrate 38 g; Dietary Fiber 7 g; Sugars 26 g; Protein 3 g; Vitamin A 35%, Vitamin C 180%, Calcium 8%, Iron 4%.

Fresh Fruit Crunch

2 oranges, peeled and torn into sections
1 apple or pear, diced
½ cup grapes, halved

1 banana, peeled, thinly sliced
2 tablespoon orange juice
½ cup low-fat granola cereal

In a medium bowl, combine orange sections, apple or pear, grapes, banana, and orange juice. Sprinkle granola over fruit and stir gently. Serve immediately as dessert, or for breakfast topped with low-fat yogurt. Yield: 6 servings

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 100; Total Fat 1 g; Sodium 25 mg; Total Carbohydrate 24 g; Dietary Fiber 3 g; Sugars 14 g; Protein 2 g; Vitamin A 6%, Vitamin C 60%, Calcium 2%, Iron 2%.

Breakfast Fruit Cup

2 oranges, peeled and sliced into
bite-sized pieces
1 banana, peeled and sliced

1 tablespoon raisins
½ cup low-fat yogurt
⅛ teaspoon cinnamon

In a small bowl, combine fruit. Divide fruit equally into 4 bowls. Put a rounded tablespoon of yogurt over fruit in each bowl and sprinkle with a dash of cinnamon. Yield: 4 servings

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories 90; Total Fat 1 g; Sodium 25 mg; Total Carbohydrate 20 g; Dietary Fiber 2 g; Sugars 13 g; Protein 3 g; Vitamin A 4%, Vitamin C 70%, Calcium 8%, Iron 2%.

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