



# THE GIFTS OF CITRUS

## Colorful Good Health in Holiday Dishes

by Judith Fertig

Winter citrus fruits that arrive in a gift basket or show up on sale at the grocer present a welcome bright spot on winter's darker days. Valencia and blood oranges, limes and Meyer lemons are delicious in their own right, and deserve their place on the breakfast table. Yet there are many other intriguing ways to enjoy them in vinaigrettes, salads, main dishes, baked goods and desserts.

Winter citrus is full of health benefits, just when we need them most: during the busy holiday season. To start, they help bolster our immune system, guarding against colds or helping us recover faster. Their high vitamin C, or ascorbic acid, content is water soluble. According to a comprehensive study by the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, a daily intake of 400 milligrams of vitamin C can halve the incidence of colds in adults and cut their duration by 14 percent.

The flavonoid hesperidin in citrus helps boost "good" HDL cholesterol and lowers "bad" LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, report researchers in the *Journal of Nutrition*. In a new study in *Nutritional Neuroscience*, hesperidin in citrus also was found to ameliorate brain deterioration found in Alzheimer's patients.

Other studies further show that the grapefruit diet wasn't wrong; eating half a fresh grapefruit before each meal can help us lose weight. In a study conducted at the Scripps Clinic, in La Jolla, California, and published in the *Journal of Medicinal Food*, researchers put overweight volunteers on an exercise plan for 12 weeks and asked them to eat either half a fresh grapefruit or drink apple juice and pop a placebo pill before each meal. The grapefruit group dropped an average of three-and-a-half pounds, compared to only one-half pound for the apple group.

*Natural Awakenings* recommends using organic, non-GMO (genetically modified) and non-bromated ingredients whenever possible.

Limonoids, an antioxidant found in most citrus, may help guard against stomach, lung, breast and skin cancer, according to the U.S. Agricultural Research Service. Animal and human cell studies found that limonoids—especially those in fresh oranges—harbor potential as anticancer compounds. Another study in *Nutritional Neuroscience* showed that the volatile compound limonene, found in the rind of a lemon, can enhance memory.

As nights grow colder and longer, winter citrus “adds a little sunshine to every meal,” says Jamie Schler, author of the recently released cookbook *Orange Appeal: Savory & Sweet*. Schler grew up in Florida, surrounded by

citrus groves between the Atlantic Coast and Indian River.

“Winters meant Dad’s workbench in the garage groaning under the weight of brown paper grocery bags filled to bursting with navels, tangerines, grapefruits, Valencias and tangelos,” writes Schler. “I fondly recall trips in the old green station wagon to the groves on chilly weekend mornings where we could pick them ourselves.” Today, Schler and her husband own and operate the boutique Hotel Diderot, in Chinon, France, where life’s a feast—especially during citrus season.

*Judith Fertig writes cookbooks and foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).*

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## Zesty Citrus Holiday Recipes

### Moroccan Spiced Orange Slices with Orange Blossom Water

Orange blossom or orange flower water is available at better grocery stores, kitchen shops, Middle Eastern markets or online.

Yields: 4 to 5 servings

5 medium to large navel or large blood oranges

3 Tbsp orange blossom water

1 tsp ground cinnamon

2 Tbsp honey or date sugar

½ pomegranate, seeded

1½ to 2 Tbsp coarsely chopped unsalted pistachios

8 to 10 mint leaves, chopped or torn, for garnish

Peel the oranges and cut away all of the white pith and outer membrane.

Slice each orange across the core into ¼-inch slices, six per orange, reserving any juice that runs off. Push out and discard any spongy white core.

Fan the slices in concentric circles, slightly overlapping the fruit, on a large round serving platter.



Drizzle the orange blossom water and any reserved runoff juice over the fruit. Using a fine sieve, lightly and evenly dust with cinnamon and a generous drizzle of honey.

Chill the oranges for at least 1 hour or longer in the refrigerator before serving.

When ready to serve, sprinkle the pomegranate seeds, pistachios and mint leaves evenly over the top.



photo by Stephen Blancett

## Meyer Lemon Chia Seed Bowl with Tangerines

Yields: 2 servings for breakfast, or as a snack or dessert

- ¼ heaping cup chia seeds*
- 1½ cups dairy or non-dairy milk*
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup, or to taste*
- 1 Tbsp Meyer lemon juice (or other citrus juice)*
- Pinch of sea salt*
- ½ tsp lemon zest*
- Fresh tangerine segments for garnish*

In a bowl, stir together the chia seeds, milk, maple syrup, Meyer lemon juice, salt and lemon zest.

Cover and chill for at least 1 hour.

To serve, spoon the chia seed mixture into bowls and garnish with tangerine segments.

## Shiitake Mushroom and Pea Risotto with Orange

Yields: 6 servings as side dish or starter or 4 as main dish

- 2 Tbsp butter or margarine, divided*
- 2 Tbsp olive oil, divided, plus more as needed*
- 8.8 oz shiitake mushrooms, stems removed, caps sliced into ¼- to ½-inch strips*
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste*
- Zest of 1 orange*
- 2 large oranges, juiced, about 1 cup, divided*
- 1 small yellow onion, peeled and chopped*
- 9 oz Arborio rice*
- 4 cups warm chicken or vegetable stock or broth*
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh basil or 2 tsp dried; or 1 Tbsp finely chopped fresh sage leaves or 1 tsp dried*
- 1½ cups young, tiny sweet peas, fresh or frozen*

Heat 1 tablespoon each of the butter and oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat until sizzling starts.

Add the mushrooms and salt and pepper and cook, stirring, until tender, 4 to 5 minutes, adding more oil if needed.

Add ¼ cup orange juice and simmer for 3 to 5 minutes until the juice evaporates and the mushrooms are very tender and glazed. Transfer the mushrooms to a bowl and set aside.

Add the remaining butter and oil to the skillet and return to the heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, for 3 to 4 minutes over medium heat until softened, transparent and just starting to turn golden.

Add the rice and zest and toss with the onions until all the grains are coated in oil. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes more, stir-



photo by Stephen Blancett

ring, until the rice becomes translucent. Add 2 ladles (about  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup) of stock and cook, stirring constantly and gently, until the liquid is almost absorbed.

If using fresh peas, add them with the first addition of stock. Stir in the fresh or dried herbs at the same time. Continue cooking the risotto over medium heat, adding 2 more ladles (about  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup) of stock at a time, stirring constantly, allowing each addition of liquid to be almost absorbed before adding more broth.

When the rice has cooked for 10 minutes in this manner, add all the remaining juice and cook until it's absorbed. Continue cooking the rice, stirring, adding 2 ladles (about  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup) of broth at a time until the liquid is absorbed, about another 10 minutes.

When the rice has cooked for a total of 20 minutes, if using frozen peas, stir in the peas, as well as the mushrooms.

Add any remaining stock and cook, stirring, until the liquid is absorbed and the rice is tender and creamy. Total cooking time should be 20 to 25 minutes from the moment the rice is added to the skillet. Taste and add more salt or pepper if needed.

## Baby Vegetables and Microgreens with Charry Lime Vinaigrette

Yields: 4 servings

### Charry Lime Vinaigrette:

*Zest of 2 limes*

*Juice from the grilled limes*

*1 Tbsp seasoned rice wine vinegar*

*1 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro*

*1 tsp Dijon mustard*

*1 tsp sorghum or maple syrup*

*$\frac{1}{4}$  cup extra-virgin olive oil*

*Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper*

### Vegetables:

*4 oz baby radishes*

*4 oz baby carrots, with some of the green top*

*4 oz baby leeks, trimmed*

*4 oz baby yellow pattypan squash*

*2 oz microgreens*



Prepare a medium-hot fire in the grill.

Brush the radishes, carrots and leeks with olive oil and place in a grilling basket or on a perforated grill rack.

Grill for 4 to 5 minutes, turning often, until the vegetables have just started to brown at the edges.

Zest the limes and set the zest aside.

Halve the limes and grill, cut sides down, for 1 to 2 minutes or until they have good grill marks; adds a smoky, caramelized flavor.

For the Charry Lime Vinaigrette, squeeze the juice of the grilled lime halves into a bowl. Whisk in the reserved lime zest, rice wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, sorghum and olive oil together until well blended. Season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Arrange the vegetables on salad plates and garnish with microgreens. Spoon the vinaigrette over all and serve.

*Adapted lemon and lime recipes are from Red, White, and 'Que: Farm Fresh Foods for the American Grill by Karen Adler and Judith Fertig, permission of Running Press.*

*Adapted orange recipes are from Orange Appeal, by Jamie Schler, permission of Gibbs Smith.*