



# Eat More Citrus Fruit!

Did you know citrus fruits are at their peak sweetness right now (mid March), at the end of the season?

Citrus stays on the tree for months, and over time the sugars build while the acidity softens. That shift is what makes a really good orange or grapefruit taste noticeably better now than it did earlier in the winter. If citrus has not been on your radar lately, this is a good time to bring it back.

## Where citrus comes from (and can you grow it?)

Most citrus in the U.S. comes from Florida, California, Texas, and Arizona, where warm temperatures and consistent sun support growth.

You can grow citrus at home, even in colder climates, by using dwarf varieties in containers. Lemon, lime, and mandarin trees do well in pots as long as they get enough light and are brought indoors during the winter. It takes some patience, but it is very doable.

## What you are getting nutritionally

Citrus is best known for vitamin C, but it offers more than that. It provides vitamin C to support immune function and help with iron absorption, potassium to support blood pressure, and folate for cell growth. Citrus also contains plant compounds associated with heart health. When you eat the whole fruit, you also get fiber from the membranes, which helps with fullness and digestion. Juice provides vitamin C, but whole fruit offers a more complete package.

## How to pick good citrus

There are a few simple things to look for. Heavier fruit tends to be juicier. The skin does not need to be perfect, and color is not always a reliable indicator of ripeness. It is best to avoid fruit with soft or mushy spots. Mandarins often have looser skin, which is normal. Oranges and grapefruit should feel firm for their size.

## Citrus you might not be buying (but should)

**Blood oranges:** Deep red flesh and a slightly berry-like flavor. Less sharp than regular oranges, and are great in salads or sliced on their own.

**Cara Cara oranges:** Pink inside, low acidity, and very sweet. These are easy to like, especially if regular ones sometimes taste too tart.

**Sumo citrus (dekopon):** Large, easy to peel, and very sweet with almost no seeds. More expensive, but reliably good.

**Meyer lemons:** Sweeter and less acidic than standard lemons. Good when you want lemon flavor without the harshness.

**Kumquats:** You eat the whole thing, peel and all. The peel is sweet and the inside is tart. Slice them into salads or eat them as is.

**Pomelo:** Very large, thick peel, and mild flavor. Less juicy than grapefruit, but slightly sweeter and less bitter.

**Minneola (honeybell):** A cross between a grapefruit and a mandarin. Juicy, tangy, and easy to peel.

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## A few useful things to know

- Citrus does not continue to ripen after it is picked, so what you buy is what you get.
- The white pith has a slightly bitter taste, but it also contains fiber and beneficial compounds.
- Zest adds concentrated flavor without adding sugar or salt.

A squeeze of lemon or lime at the end of cooking can noticeably improve the flavor of a dish.

## Ten easy ways to use more citrus

1. Toss grapefruit sections with arugula, avocado, and pumpkin seeds, then dress with olive oil and a squeeze of lemon
2. Add orange segments to a grain bowl with farro, chickpeas, cucumber, and herbs, then finish with lemon and olive oil
3. Mix chopped mandarins into a cabbage slaw with carrots and cilantro, then dress with lime juice and olive oil
4. Roast carrots or sweet potatoes, then finish with orange zest, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt
5. Stir lime juice into black beans with garlic and cumin just before serving
6. Toss spinach with orange, red onion, and walnuts, then dress with a simple citrus vinaigrette
7. Spoon citrus segments over plain yogurt with nuts and seeds
8. Make a surprisingly delicious guac with mashed avocado, chopped mandarin oranges, chopped pistachios, crushed dried hot peppers, lime juice, and salt
9. Toss roasted cauliflower with chickpeas, chopped dates, and toasted almonds, then finish with a mix of orange juice, lemon zest, olive oil, and a pinch of salt for a sweet-savory traybake that holds up well for leftovers
10. Combine orange and grapefruit segments with thinly sliced fennel, fresh herbs, olive oil, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt

# Roasted Citrus, White Beans, and Crispy Shallots



## Ingredients (serves 6):

- 1 orange, sliced into rounds
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced (seeds removed)
- 1 can white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 small red onion or 2 shallots, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon honey or maple syrup
- Zest of 1 lemon
- Handful of herbs (parsley or dill)
- Salt and black pepper

## Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F.
2. Toss the citrus slices and onions with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Spread on a sheet pan and roast for about 20 minutes, until softened and lightly caramelized.
3. While that cooks, warm the white beans in a pan with a little olive oil and salt.
4. Chop the roasted citrus and onions and fold them into the beans along with any juices from the pan. Add the lemon zest, a small drizzle of honey or maple syrup, and fresh herbs. Taste and adjust salt.

Note: Roasting mellows the sharpness of the citrus and brings out deeper flavor, which pairs well with the creamy beans.