

Oranges

Continued from Page 10

Shop for firm fruits that are slightly heavy with light, unblemished skin. They should have a fresh, pronounced fragrance. Finally, don't discard that peel. The zest — the peel without the bitter pith — can be added to any salad dressing, baked chicken, muffins or a host of other foods for a punch of citrus flavor.

To rest, use the vegetable peeler to cut off a thin, long layer of the skin. Avoid including the white, fleshy pith between the skin and fruit. The pith is bitter and will destroy the rich flavor of zest. Place the strips on a cutting board and, using a sharp chef's knife, cut each into match-stick-size pieces. Next, use the knife to chop the strips into tiny pieces, releasing the aroma and oils.

When a recipe calls for orange juice, fresh squeezed is the best. Squeeze the most juice from an orange by rolling them on the counter with a firm heel of the hand. Use a citrus reamer or orange press to extract the liquid from each half, and a mini strainer to keep seeds and excess pulp out.

Oranges make convenient, healthy snacks, but there are other ways to weave this everyday citrus into your daily diet.

► **Use your citrus in a salad.** The tart-sweet flavor of oranges pairs well with fresh greens and vegetables.

► **Add segments to yogurt,** in a bowl of oatmeal or on top of ice cream.

► **Make orange-infused butter** for an unexpected fresh taste on pancakes, seafood, chicken, biscuits or toast. To make, allow a stick of butter to soften to room temperature. Add a few drops of juice and a pinch of zest and mix with a fork or hand mixer. Add more juice and zest to taste. For bolder flavors, use the zest of one fruit and a tablespoon of juice.

Oranges can be stored for three days at room temperature or for two weeks in the crisper section of the refrigerator.

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5 types of orange

The high season for oranges begins this month and runs through March. For optimal flavor and freshness, select oranges grown in Arizona or in the U.S. Here are a few varieties to choose from:

Navel: One of the most common varieties, they are named for the navel-shaped dimple on its base. They also are characterized by their red-colored skin, juicy, sweet and almost-always seedless flesh. Another plus: They are easy to peel.

Carters: A type of navel, this orange stands out for its dark pink or red flesh.

Valencia: The classic juicing orange, it's a large fruit with more seeds than a navel. Their thin skin is often green-tinted, but this greening has no impact on flavor. To peel, trim a thin slice from each end of the fruit, then set orange on one end. Cut away strips of peel from top to bottom, until all peel is removed.

More or blood: The red flesh of these oranges contain complex, spicy flavors with a hint of raspberry. All oranges contain carotene, which makes them orange. Morsos get their red color from high concentrations of a pigment called anthocyanin, a powerful antioxidant.

Seville: A cooking orange with a bitter flavor. Thick-skinned and filled with seeds, they are used in most savory dishes requiring orange juice, and for marmalade.

Sweet-and-Sour Shell Mac and Cheese

This dish is high in flavor but keeps calories, saturated fat and sodium in check. The trick is whisking together a lightened-up bechamel sauce, with low-fat milk and flour, while skipping the butter. Fresh lemon juice and zest add flavorful balance to this dish and help reduce salt and sodium in your favorite recipes. Fresh orange adds a lovely surprise with fruity notes, not sweet.

Servings: 3 (about 8 1/2 cups each).

Prep time: 30 minutes.

Cook time: 30 minutes.

3 cups medium pasta shells (about 6 cups cooked)

2 1/2 cups low-fat milk

2 tablespoons unbleached flour

1 1/2 cups shredded sharp white Cheddar cheese

1 lemon, zest finely grated (2 teaspoons juice)

1 orange, zest finely grated (1 teaspoon juice)

1/4 plus 1/2 teaspoon finely grated nutmeg (or 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder



Orange-Brined Chicken requires marinating the bird for 24 to 48 hours, but the flesh will be juicy and the skin crisp and wonderfully browned.

Roasted Orange-Brined Chicken

Marinating chicken in fresh orange juice produces a juicy interior, crackly brown exterior or delicate crispness, slightly sweet orange flavor. The acidity of the citrus and vinegar adds a bright balance to the dish, while reducing the need for excess salt. Roasting the chicken on a rack allows for the fat to drip away from the meat.

Servings: 4 thighs and 4 legs.

Prep time: 30 minutes.

Cook time: 65 minutes.

Inactive prep time: 48 hours.

6 medium oranges (1 orange with zest finely grated, all oranges juiced)

1 lemon, zest finely grated (1 tablespoon juice)

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

2 tablespoons basil chiffonade (stack leaves, roll and thinly slice)

1 tablespoon finely chopped shallots

1 tablespoon chopped garlic

4 chicken leg quarters (about 4 1/2 pounds), trimmed of surface fat and excess skin

1/2 teaspoon plus 1/4 teaspoon salt

Freshly ground white or black pepper, to taste

Line a medium mixing bowl with a plastic gallon-size zipper-lock bag and fold the top inch over to form a cuff. Pour the juices, zests and vinegar into the bag.

Combine the basil, shallots and garlic, and gently stuff under the skin of the chicken thighs, being careful not to tear the skin.

Place the chicken in the bag. Squeeze all of the air out of the bag, seal tightly and refrigerate for 1-2 nights, rotating the bag on the second day to redistribute the marinade.

About 30 minutes before cooking, remove the chicken from the refrigerator and pour some of the marinade into a cup. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a large sheet pan with

foil and place a cookie cooling rack on top.

Transfer the chicken to the rack. Season the chicken on all sides with salt and pepper, leaving the chicken rounded sides up. Roast the chicken for 30 minutes. Remove the chicken from the oven and brush on the marinade.

Put back in the oven, until an internal meat thermometer reads 165 degrees when inserted into the thigh, about 15-20 minutes. Allow chicken to rest 5 minutes before cutting.

Per serving (1 thigh): 365 calories, 22 g total fat (6 g saturated fat), 220 mg sodium, 133 mg cholesterol, 2 g total carbohydrate (0 fiber), 56 g protein.

Per serving (1 drumstick): 280 calories, 15 g total fat (6 g saturated fat), 211 mg sodium, 106 mg cholesterol, 2 g total carbohydrate (0 fiber), 30 g protein.



Start with English Breakfast or Orange Pekoe for Cinnamon-Citrus Tea With Thyme.

Cinnamon-Citrus Tea With Thyme

Enjoy the flavor, warmth and nostalgia of the season with this low-calorie tea made with simple ingredients. You'll fall in love with the aroma of the orange zest and cinnamon. Fresh orange juice adds a hint of natural sweetness, with a good source of vitamin C.

Servings: 1 (12-ounce portion).

Prep time: 2 minutes.

Cook time: 2 minutes.

3 orange slices, plus 1 orange wedge

1 lemon slice

1 fresh piece cinnamon stick

Black tea bag (like English Breakfast or Orange Pekoe)

Thyme sprig

Heat 10 ounces water, orange and lemon slices, and cinnamon stick until boiling around the edges. Place the tea bag and thyme in a glass or mug. Pour the hot water and fruit into the glass and steep 5 minutes. Squeeze the juice into the glass from the remaining orange wedge.

Per serving: 25 calories, 0 total fat (0 saturated fat), 0 sodium, 0 cholesterol, 6 g total carbohydrate (0 fiber), 0 protein.



The orange notes are fruity, not sweet, in Sweet-and-Sour Shell Mac and Cheese.

Freshly ground white or black pepper, to taste

Cooking oil spray

1/2 cup fresh whole-wheat breadcrumbs, dried (or use pre-made breadcrumbs)

1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a baking dish with cooking oil spray. Cook the pasta according to package directions.

Whisk the milk and flour in a medium saucepan. Place on medium heat and cook while stirring almost constantly until mixture begins to boil, about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to low and whisk in the cheese, lemon and orange zests, nutmeg, salt, garlic powder and pepper, and stir until the cheese melts completely. Stir in the lemon and orange juices. Combine the cheese sauce and drained pasta. Transfer to the prepared pan.

In a bowl, stir the breadcrumbs while drizzling in the olive oil. Sprinkle the pasta with breadcrumbs and bake 30 minutes, until bubbling around the edges and browned on top.

Per serving: 279 calories, 8 g total fat (5 g saturated fat), 245 mg sodium, 25 mg cholesterol, 36 g total carbohydrate (2 g fiber), 12 g protein.

Oranges Clipping Page 2

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