

GROW YOUR MENU WITH SEASONAL CITRUS



Blood Orange Arugula Salad



Savory Cheesecake



By Mary Klest

Citrus makes life in the kitchen more interesting. Peak season for US-grown citrus is during the winter months, when many specialty varieties with unique flavor profiles are available. It's time to rethink how best to layer and peak flavors, add color, or complement comfort foods. Many varieties—like Navel oranges, Cara Cara Navel oranges, Blood oranges, Minneola tangelos and Pummelos are only available this time of year. Sunkist's growers in California and Arizona have generations of growing experience and that commitment brings out the best characteristics in their citrus. Such care stimulates chefs. They understand how primary fresh and flavorful ingredients are to their seasonal menus.

REACH FOR SPECIALTY CITRUS

Need to lighten up a dish? Hit the right note between sweet and tart? Add some tang or smoke? Brighten the plate and reach for fresh, in-season citrus. The tart and sweet flavors in fresh citrus are noticeable and distinct. At peak season, citrus flavors are more dramatic. Aromatic quality enhances its unique flavor profile. Imagine what can be done with the he distinct floral aroma of Meyer lemon zest or the bold, tangy juice of the Minneola tangelo.

INTRODUCE SEASONAL CITRUS FLAVOR

Marinades add extra flavor to meat, poultry, fish and vegetables. Combine freshly squeezed juice from a Cara Cara Navel orange with brown sugar, ginger, garlic, pepper flakes and sesame oil. The Cara Cara has lower acidity than regular oranges and has beautiful pink flesh and juice. Being seedless, Caras are very easy for chefs to work with.

Make vinaigrettes with the juice of seasonal citrus like mandarins, clementines or Minneola tangelos. Craft new infused olive oils with blood oranges to flavor vegetables such as asparagus. Blood oranges, with their deep red flesh and juice are very versatile. Nothing is simpler than to segment and add them to a dish for color and flavor. Create candied blood oranges by adding slices to a boiling pot of sugar and water and simmer until the syrup has thickened slightly.

Citrus glazes add another layer of flavor. Add thin slices of Navel oranges, pummelo, and lemon to boiling water and season with other ingredients to spice up the menu. Try chiles, mustard, and Allspice.

Add a side of clementines that are zested, simmered, cooled, segmented and then baked with roasted chicken. The clementine cooking juices flavor the chicken stock and create a tasty side that complements a savory chicken dish.

TRY IT HOT, COLD OR ROOM TEMPERATURE

Introduce a smoky flavor without adding fat. Grill, roast or char citrus. Heat tones down sweetness. But it's a delicate balance. The aromatics will tell if it has gone too far. Scorching can diminish rather than amplify the flavor. To create a citrus ash first grill the citrus, let dry, then pound it into a powder. Use the ash in sauces and seasonings, on fish and vegetables.

Keep citrus granita on hand by mixing juices from Cara Cara Navel oranges, and pineapple with stock syrup, then freezing. To get flaky crystals scrape every 20 minutes with a fork until the granita is completely frozen.

Citrus salt is also easy to prepare. Cover a baking pan with two cups of Kosher salt. Roll the room temperature whole fruit onto the salt. The salt takes on the oils from the fruit's skin giving it a citrus flavor.

PEEL, JUICE, ZEST FOR COLOR, FLAVOR AND TEXTURE

Cut citrus into halves, slices or wedges. Squeeze, zest, or peel. Citrus is robust and versatile. Use the peel to make citrus infused oils, extracts and liqueurs. The aromatic oils in the peel add both bouquet and taste to drinks, cooking oils and salts. Add dimension and color with citrus wheels, twists, and slices.

The zest can create texture and taste in baked recipes. Add zests to pan sauces when grilling meat. Sprinkle zest on soups and salads, on rice and noodles. Create citrus infused oil by adding lemon, lime and orange zest to heated grapeseed oil. Steep for two hours, strain and refrigerate.

Citrus yields more juice while at room temperature. Break the juice sacs by hand rolling the fruit on a surface. Cut the fruit in half crosswise and squeeze out the juice. Use citrus juice for a nutritious salad dressing. Combine lemon juice, orange juice, vinegar, oil and shallot in a bowl. Whisk and season with salt.

When fresh from the grove citrus arrives, keep it fresh by storing in a cool, well-ventilated area. The best temperature range for most citrus is 45° to 48° F. Place cartons on racks or pallets to maintain air circulation.

Cooking with fresh citrus varieties will add flavor, color, texture and aroma to any seasonal menu. Using the whole fruit is a lesson in frugal, sustainable and artful cooking. ●



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For information on citrus seasonality and flavor profiles visit www.sunkist.com/citrus/



Lemon Goat Cheese

BITTER AND SWEET IN THE SAME BITE

EXECUTIVE CHEF YONI LEVY

creates approachable, layered, big flavored, yet delicate food at Outerlands in San Francisco. "I like dishes where there's not too much going on. Few frills. When a guest bites into it, they sense that a lot went into the preparation." Fresh citrus sets the scene for some of his most beautiful, simple plates.

For Levy, citrus works well for layering flavors. "My favorite citrus is tart and sweet. I want it to have that beautiful balance." A classic preparation is to cut, char and juice. In his Gulf Shrimp and Mandarins dish he chars the raw satsuma mandarin rounds almost black with the peels on to get a little bitterness while the sugar is caramelizing. "The charred slices create bitter and sweet in the same bite," he says. He creates a chilled broth with mandarin juice and a mixture of dried chili shrimp stock. "It's lightly tart and rich with deep umami from the shrimp and chili." The mandarin juice releases a tropical taste with sweet aroma. Topped with herb salad he says, "It hits on all the notes."

Levy uses his senses when selecting in-season fresh citrus. "I look at the outside color of a beautiful citrus fruit such as a blood orange. I grab it to feel how firm it is. I smell its fragrance. I hold it to see how heavy with juice it is. These are all indicators. Citrus is meant to be consumed while fresh."

To minimize waste he uses the whole fruit. He saves the mandarin peel for marmalade. He also blanches, pickles, and candies citrus peels. Using a microplane, he grinds and mixes the rinds into smoked citrus salt and makes citrus powder from dried skins. During the height of the California citrus season in December and January he offers citrus salads, simple and delicious.



Gulf Shrimp and Mandarins, Outerlands, San Francisco



Chef Yoni Levy, Outerlands, San Francisco

Photos: Alanna Hale