



Kissed by the Sun: Florida Oranges & Other Citrus Gems

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When thinking of the Sunshine State, few items symbolizes it as powerfully as an orange, a citrus fruit that's very shape resembles the sun. The color of its rind and the fruit within suggest the golden rays of our tropical paradise, and its taste has a citrusy tang, making it a natural addition to refreshing, exotic cocktails, served up poolside. In recognition of its considerable appeal, the juice of this delectable fruit was designated as the official state beverage in 1967 and, 50 years later, it continues to endure in this role. Today, when visitors stop into Florida's welcome center and receive their complimentary sample of orange juice, that first sip often signals that they have truly arrived in paradise.

Interestingly, for a fruit so identifiable with this area, the orange is believed, like many other related citrus plants, to have originated in tropical parts of Asia from southern China to Indonesia. Genetic studies have shown that all of the citrus varieties found today trace their roots back to a single common ancestor plant that first appeared around 7 million years ago. The earliest recorded reference to citrus fruits can be found in Chinese manuscripts written around 2,200 BC. The word "citrus" itself is derived from the Greek term *kedar*, which means "cedar," a name most likely selected because both types of trees are thought to exude a similar scent.

As Europeans began to seek trade routes to the Far East, the first citrus fruit that attracted attention was the citron, a large fragrant fruit with a thick rind that became established in Europe around 310 BC. Soon after, the sour orange, the lemon, the sweet orange and then the pummelo, the earliest version of the grapefruit, made their way to that continent. These tempting treats were

introduced by groups including the Moors and the Portuguese, plus the Italian explorers and traders who found the fruits on their voyages to Asia and the Middle East.

During the age of exploration, citrus began to expand from the Old to the New World. Some sources credit Christopher Columbus with establishing orange trees throughout the Caribbean islands since he brought seeds to this area during his second voyage in the late 15th century. Citrus arrived in America when early Spanish explorers, possibly Ponce de Leon, planted the first orange trees near St. Augustine toward the beginning of the 1500s. Spanish missionaries brought them into California in the 18th century.

By the next century, citrus trees could be found growing throughout many forests in Florida, as well as in cultivated groves in areas along the St. Johns River and near Tampa Bay. Known at that time as a "rich-man's dish," grapefruit arrived in Florida in the



When to Find...

Here's a handy guide to when these citrus fruits are harvested in Florida:

Oranges

Ambersweet: Oct. through Jan.
Blood Orange: Feb. through April
Cara Cara (Red Navel): Oct. through Jan.
Hamlin: Oct. through Jan.
Navel: Oct. through Jan.
Pineapple Orange: Dec. through Feb.
Valencia: March through June

Grapefruit

Duncan: Dec. through May
Flame: Nov. through May
Marsh: Nov. through May
Ray Ruby: Nov. through May
Rio Red: Nov. through May
Ruby Red (Ruby or Redblush): Nov. through May
Star Red: Dec. through May
Thompson (Pink Marsh): Dec. through May

Tangerines

Dancy: Dec. through Jan.
Fallglo: Oct. through Nov.
Murcott (Honey): Jan. through March
Robinson: Oct. through Dec.
Satsuma: Nov. through Jan.
Sunburst: Nov. through Dec.

Tangors

Clementine: Dec. through March
Ortanique: Jan. through March
Temple (Temple Orange): Jan. through March

Tangelos

Minneola ("Honeybell"): Dec. through Feb.
Orlando: Nov. through Jan.

Kumquats: Oct. through Feb.

Limes: June through Sept.

Limequats: Nov. through March

Information from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Science



early 1800s, when the first grove of these delectable fruits was planted in present-day Safety Harbor in 1823 by a colorful character, "Count" Odet Philippe. He is credited not only with that achievement, but also with the settlement and development of Hillsborough County, where his generosity in sharing with his neighbors led to the spread of citrus throughout that area.

Following the Civil War, the state's commercial citrus industry began to take off when the development of the railroad created a way for oranges to be efficiently transported across the country, encouraging growers to cultivate them on a wider scale. A minor setback occurred in 1894 and 1895 when many of the citrus crops in Florida were destroyed by freezing temperatures. As a result, many of these fruit farms were moved further south to warmer areas where that type of weather was less likely to occur.

Within 15 years, the citrus trade had made a huge turnaround, when production reached 10 million boxes. During World War II, a process for making concentrated orange juice was invented and, a short time later, a frozen version was developed, transforming this into a multi-billion-dollar industry. By 1950, over 100 million boxes of citrus were picked, a figure that doubled just over 20 years later. All told, the Florida Department of Agriculture reports that the citrus industry currently generates greater than \$8.6 billion in economic activity in the state. Today, the majority of citrus is grown in the southern two-thirds of the peninsula, although centrally located Polk County remains tops in citrus production.

Accounting for the considerable diversity of citrus available, research has found that they are highly prone to genetic change and that they have a propensity to hybridize. These two traits that have allowed for a wide assortment of hybrids to emerge over time. As a result, a multitude of sweet varieties developed such as mandarins, tangerines, sweet oranges, and grapefruit, plus tangy types like kumquats, lemons, limes, and bitter oranges.

Given the abundance of citrus grown in this region and around the country, it's easy to enjoy the delightful taste of these sun-kissed fruits,



beginning with a Florida favorite, the orange. With a taste like a mild tangerine, the easy-to-peel Ambersweet orange contains more fiber than an English muffin. Named for the striking dark pink, maroon or even crimson flesh inside the fruit, Blood Oranges are likely to be a bit smaller than other types, and tend to have a noticeable, delicious raspberry edge to their flavor. The Cara Cara, also known as the Red Navel, is noted for how simple it is to peel and section its sweet, colorful, seedless flesh. Deep yellow to orange in color, Hamlins are medium-sized, typically seedless oranges that are excellent for making juice. Named for the characteristic dimple on one of its ends, Navel Oranges are large to extra-large fruit with medium-thick skins that are easy to unravel and cut into pieces. Acclaimed for its rich flavor and delightful scent, the Pineapple Orange is a moderately seeded, medium to large fruit with a pebbly textured surface. Often used for making juice with a fine rich flavor and aroma, Valencia oranges are usually seedless, medium to large fruit with orange or yellow peels

that may be tinged with green. Other varieties include Gardner, Homosassa, Jaffa, Midsweet, Parson Brown, Pope Summer, Seedling, Seville and Sunstar oranges.

Attractive to citrus lovers who prefer a tart taste, numerous kinds of grapefruit are cultivated throughout the country. One of the oldest varieties grown in Florida, the large, yellow Duncan is widely considered to be one of the best tasting grapefruit, despite its abundant seeds. Flavorful, sweet and juicy, the Flame grapefruit is generally seedless with a red flesh, suggestive of its name. The Foster was the first pink variety on record; however, since it averages between 30 to 50 seeds per fruit, it has become increasingly rare. Until the introduction of the many pink and red types, the Marsh, or Marsh White, was the most widely grown variety of grapefruit in Florida. Seedless with pale yellow flesh,

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IN THE GARDEN



it is still remains in high demand for fresh markets and juice processing. The Ray Ruby is a seedless grapefruit noted for its dark pink peel and rich red flesh that retains that hue well into the late portion of its season. Originated in Texas, the Rio Red's skin is similar in shade to the Red Ruby and its flesh resembles that from the Flame grapefruit. Once one of the widest grown seedless types of grapefruit cultivated in Florida, particularly in the Indian River area, the Ruby Red (Ruby or Redblush) has a smooth yellow peel marked with dots of pink to red blush. Its segments are typically pink to red in color with few seeds. Characterized by its peel's dark pink blush and its intensely red flesh, the Star Red is a seedless variation developed in Texas. Also known as the Pink Marsh, the Thompson was the earliest seedless pink grapefruit. The characteristics of its fruit are virtually identical to the Marsh, with the exception of its pink flesh color which fades as the season progresses.

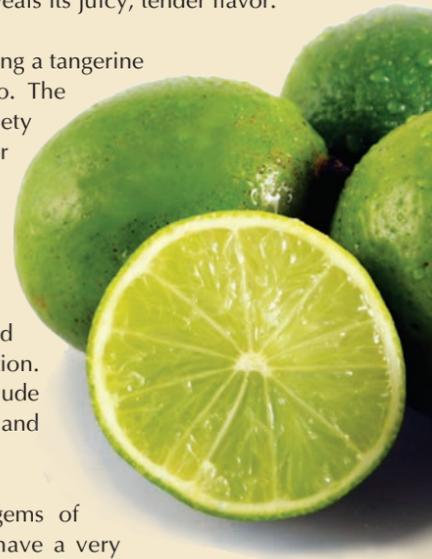
To satisfy their cravings, citrus lovers can also indulge in the fruit from a number of related specialty plants such as tangerines, tangors, tangelos and even kumquats. Tangerines and oranges are different varieties of the same species of fruit; however, a few clues can help in telling them apart. As a rule of thumb, tangerines tend to be smaller, sweeter and have looser peels, making it easier to remove the outer covering and dine on the delectable fruit. Sometimes called the "zipper skin fruit," the Dancy is a small-to-medium, deep orange or red-hued tangerine with a smooth, loose peel; few seeds; rich flavor; and a spicy aroma. Sweet, juicy and mild, the Fallglo is known to be easy to skin and break apart into delicious pieces. Often referred to as oranges, mandarins are also classified as tangerines. Mildly flavored when fresh, the fruit is moderately seeded, but it's well worth the effort for snacking. With a sweet taste and delicate fragrance reminiscent of the substance produced by bees, it's not surprising that the Murcott is often referred to as a Honey tangerine. Small

to medium in size, its covering takes on a yellow-orange shade that may be tinged with green or russet. A medium to large fruit with a smooth-to-pebbly textured peel that's easily removed, the Robinson is noted for its rich flavor. A variety of small, seedless tangerines, Satsumas are similar to Clementines; however, the key difference is that satsumas have loose coats that are easier to remove. Named for its bright, deep orange color and its sunny, sweet taste, the Sunburst has a tight skin, yet it remains simple to peel and section.

The tangor is a citrus fruit hybrid of the mandarin and sweet oranges, an origin reflected in its name which is formed by putting together the "tang" of 'tangerine' and the "or" of 'orange.' Typically growing in California and other areas, Clementines are a popular treat. Often labeled as "Cuties" or "Sweeties," these small, readily peeled, seedless fruit have a honey-sweet taste similar to a tangerine. Ortaniques, a moniker that combines the "or" for 'orange,' "tan" for 'tangerine,' and "ique" for 'unique,' are a medium-sized fruit with a pebbled, dark orange rind and orange-hued flesh that's noted for being exceptionally juicy, rich and sweet. The Temple tangor, which is also known as the Royal mandarin or Temple orange, is a medium-large fruit with a slightly thick, yet easy-to-remove reddish-orange rind. When it's unpeeled, the flesh is light orange in color, dotted with between 15 to 20 seeds, and a taste reveals its juicy, tender flavor.

A tangelo is the result of crossing a tangerine with a grapefruit or pummelo. The oldest and best-known variety of tangelo, the Minneola, or "Honeybell," has a knobby formation on its stem end, giving the fruit a bell shape. Easy to peel, the juicy Orlando has an oval to round shape, is medium to large in size and light to deep orange in coloration. Other types of tangelos include the Nova, Sampson, Seminole and Sunrise.

Known as "the little gold gems of the citrus family," kumquats have a very distinctive taste. The sweetest part, the peel, can be eaten by itself, but it delivers a unique sweet and sour flavor when combined with the pulp, less the seeds which should not be ingested. Two varieties can be found in the United States. The most common, the Nagami or Oval Kumquat was introduced into Florida from Japan in 1885 and has been grown commercially in the "Kumquat Capitol," St. Joseph since the 1890s. The tartness of the fruit makes it great for use in cooking, or for marmalades and jellies. Cultivated extensively in China, the Meiwa or Large Round Kumquat has been in the United States for over 100 years, but is still rarer in this country. Rounder in shape than Nagamis, Meiwas



are known as "sweet kumquats" and, having few seeds, they are best eaten whole.

No discussion of citrus would be complete without mentioning the yellow and green members of that fruit family, lemons, limes and limequats. Although there are nearly 50 varieties of lemons grown around the world, finding Florida-grown lemons has become more challenging; however, several types of lemons were developed in or have significant ties to the state. First grown here, the Avon is used primarily for frozen concentrate. Originally called the 'Sicily,' the 'Bearss' came from a seedling planted in 1892 located in the Bearss Grove in Lutz. Introduced from Sicily in 1875, the 'Villafranca' was Florida's leading lemon for years and produces high quality fruit. Other popular varieties in the United States include the 'Eureka,' which has become America's top commercial and home-planted lemon, one that is known for its high juice content and high acid level. The familiar Meyer is actually a hybrid of a lemon and an orange. A large lemon, the Ponderosa is used for lemon pies and juice.

Today, the Persian or Tahitian is the most common type of lime found in the United States. Generally larger and less aromatic, it tends to be both less acidic and bitter than some other varieties. Made famous by the signature pie, the Key Lime differs in that it's significantly smaller and turns yellow when ripe. Although it yields less juice and possesses more seeds than a Persian lime, its flavor is more intense.

An interesting citrus tree that's thriving in Florida is the limequat, which is a hybrid between a kumquat and a key lime. The entire fruit is edible, including the skin, and its taste is similar to a lime, but tends to have more of a bitter tang to it.

Given the considerable variety in color, taste and texture, it's easy to see why citrus has such tremendous "a-peel." Enjoy some soon, and you're sure to find plenty of sunny flavor to savor!

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