

Hooray! It's that time of year when your citrus trees are full of delicious fruit! How do you make sure that you make full use of your crop?

Here are some frequently asked questions and answers:



Q: How do I know when the fruit is ripe?

A: Citrus doesn't ripen after harvest, so it is important to pick the fruit at the right stage of maturity. You can sample fruit periodically to check for ripeness.

Oranges: Should have a yellow-orange color on at least 25 percent of the peel. Navel oranges will mature and be ready to harvest in 7 to 12 months after fruit set. Valencia oranges are generally not ready to pick until 12 to 15 months after fruit set.

Lemons: The juiciest, tastiest lemons are small and either round or oval. They should be a rich yellow in color and have a thin, smooth-textured skin with a light shine. Too much green on the skin signals that the fruit is not yet ripe. When you pick up a good lemon, it should feel heavy for its size and yield just a little to the touch.

Q: How do I store the fruit once it's picked?

A: The best way to store citrus is on the tree. Pick the amount you need at the time and invite friends to share in your harvest! If you have purchased fruit or have picked too much fruit at once, store them in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator. Make sure that you eat any fruit that has torn peel. These will spoil quickly.

Q: Are there any risks of food borne illness that I need to worry about when handling fresh citrus?

A: Fresh citrus is rich in many nutrients and has not been traced to any cases of food borne illness. However, fresh unpasteurized orange juice has been associated with several outbreaks of food borne illnesses. It is important to follow hygiene protocols closely when handling fresh fruit.

Q: Do I need to wash the fruit before I use it?

A: Yes. Rinse citrus with cool tap water just before preparing or eating even if the rinds will be removed. Don't use soap or detergents (they may contain materials not approved for food

contact).

Q: How long does prepared citrus last outside the refrigerator?

A: Refrigerate fresh citrus products within two hours of peeling or cutting. Discard leftover cut citrus and freshly squeezed juice after two hours at room temperature.

Q: What's the best way to juice lemons?

A: Always let lemons warm to room temperature before zesting or juicing them; you'll notice a marked difference in yields from a room temperature lemon compared to a lemon out of the crisper. Roll the lemon gently under your palm on a hard countertop or cutting board for a minute before juicing. This will help break down the pulp and help you harvest every last drop of lemon juice. If you don't have a juicer for citrus fruits, a fork and strong hands work just as well.

Q: Can I dry lemons for use later?

A: Dried lemon slices make a terrific garnish. Just cut unpeeled fruit into 1/8" thick slices, discarding ends. Place on a large wire rack on a baking sheet and dry in a 170-degree oven for 4 hours. Remove from oven to air dry. Citrus will not rehydrate a product close to its original fresh state. If you're looking for a product close to the original fresh lemon or lime, dehydrating is not the method!

Q: Can citrus be canned or frozen?

A: Yes! There are a variety of delicious ways you can use and preserve citrus. For how-to details and lots of recipes for canned citrus, marmalade, preserved lemons and much, much more please go to:

<http://ucanr.edu/ucanr-oranges>

Q: What are some other ways I can use fresh lemons?

A: Here are some tips from Saticoy Lemon Association:

<https://saticoylemon.com/lemon-facts/>

Uses:

- Pierce a whole lemon a number of times with a fork, then place in the cavity of a chicken or turkey before roasting. This will keep the breast meat moist and infuse the whole bird with a delicious flavor.
- Lemon can help remove a stain from white linens. Just rub the affected area with a cut edge of lemon, and then hang item to dry in bright sunlight.
- Freeze fresh lemon slices and water in ice cube trays and serve with your favorite sun tea.
- Freeze freshly made lemonade in ice cube trays for use in lemonade, sun tea or soda.
- Boil thin slices of lemon with sugar to make small candied slices for garnishes. Candied slices are easily frozen in plastic wrap for later use.
- To make the most of lemon as a garnish on a drink, rub the rind of the lemon (the outside) on the edge of the glass. The result is a hint of lemon with each sip!

For a more detailed information about citrus, please visit these resources (which have been summarized here for the FAQs):

1. Oranges: Safe Methods to Store, Preserve and Enjoy
<https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8199.pdf>

2. Citrus: Preserve It, Serve It!
https://ucanr.edu/sites/mfp_of_cs/files/333872.pdf

3. Saticoy Lemons:
<https://saticoylemon.com/lemon-facts/>