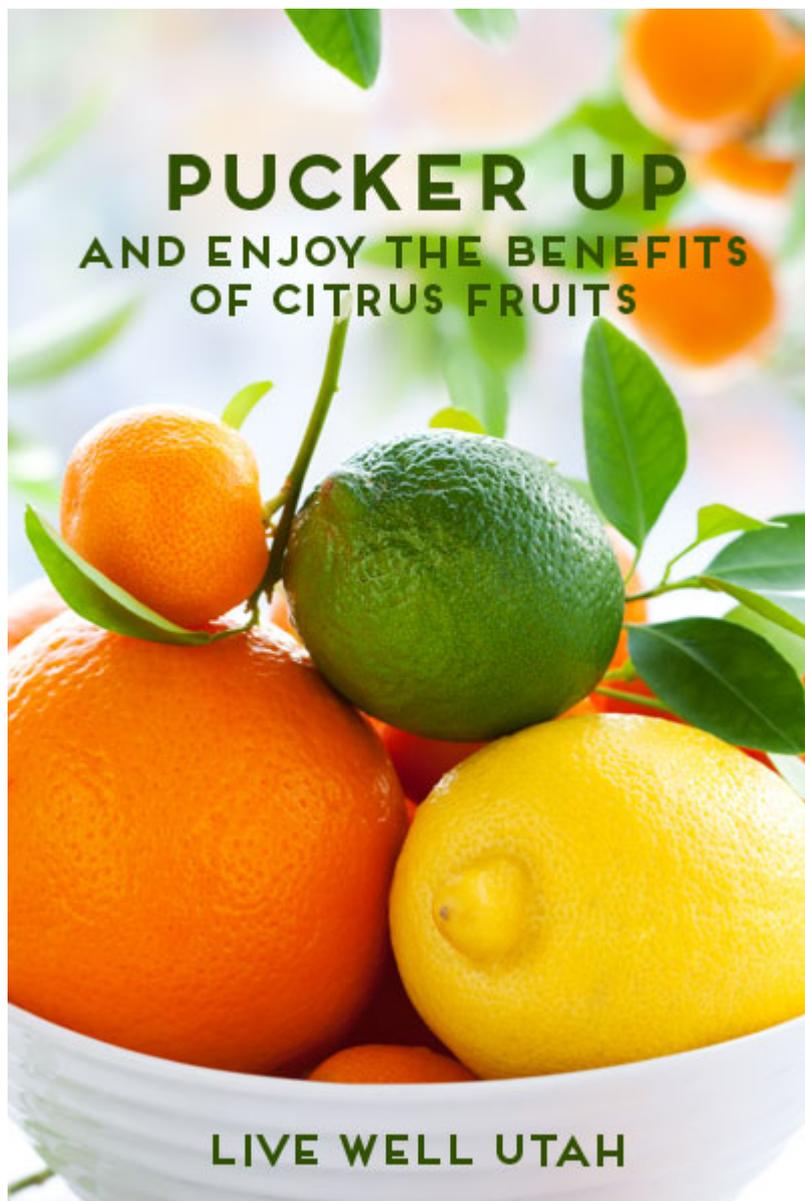


# Pucker up and Enjoy the Benefits of Citrus Fruits

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There is an abundance of citrus fruits in grocery stores this time of year. The prime harvest time for most of these fruits is in the late fall and early winter months, which makes right now a peak time to enjoy these healthful foods.

Citrus fruits are full of vitamin C, which helps maintain a

strong immune system and helps protect against scurvy. Citrus fruits promote heart health and reduce the risk of some chronic diseases. They can also aid in cancer prevention and are useful in diabetes sugar level control. Citrus fruit skin is high in essential oils used in flavorings or as fragrant essences in aromatherapy oils, cosmetics and soaps. Other important nutrients found in citrus fruits are fiber, folate, lycopene, potassium and vitamin B6.

Each fruit color provides different nutrients that our bodies need. It is important to include a variety of colors every day for these important nutrients. Consider this information.

- Red fruit contains antioxidants that help fight heart disease, lower cholesterol and prevent some cancers.
- Green fruit provides phytochemicals to help protect eyes and prevent cancerous tumors. Greens have essential vitamins including folate, minerals and fiber.
- Orange and yellow fruit contain beta-carotene that is essential for a good immune system and is rich in vitamin C, folate and vitamin A.
- Blue and purple fruit provide phytochemicals which are antioxidants that protect against cancer and disease. The blue and purple also provide vitamin C, folic acid and fiber.
- White fruit provides allicin, sulfaforaphanes, polyphenols and phytochemicals that help in fighting cancers and lowering blood pressure and cholesterol.

Citrus fruits are also objects of beauty and decor. A bowl of fresh fruit makes a great centerpiece. It can also remind you that selecting a piece of fruit rather than candy or cookies is a wise choice. It is smart to keep fresh fruit within reach to encourage daily consumption. USDA's MyPlate recommends eating 2 cups of fruit every day. This may be in the form of juice, fresh, canned or dried fruits.

There are many ways to increase fruits in your daily diet. Add

oranges and lemons to water to allow infusing overnight. Add fresh lemons and limes to drinks. Eat half a grapefruit every morning for breakfast. Have a citrus snack every day. Prepare salads using citrus fruit with lettuce and spinach. Top entrees with a fruit sauce.

As the peak fruit season begins to level off, you may want to try home canning grapefruits and oranges. This simple and fast process provides you with home-canned fruit that makes a wonderful breakfast fruit mix and prevents the waste of fruits. Begin by selecting firm, sweet grapefruits and oranges. Peel and remove the white tissue. Break the fruit into sections and fill jars with the fruit. Next, fill jars with water or hot syrup. Water works well, but a light syrup of 1 cup sugar to 4 cups of water provides an enriched flavor. Pour the liquid over the fruit in the jars, leaving one-half inch headspace. Apply the lids and rings and process pints or quarts in a water bath for 15 minutes at an elevation of 2,000 to 4,000 feet. Adjustments will need to be made for other elevations. Further information can be found in the Ball Blue Book, available at: <http://freshpreservingstore.com/search/ball-blue-book/> or from your county Extension office.