

Gratifying Grapefruit

Winter is grapefruit's time to shine. Grapefruit is part of the citrus family. Did you know grapefruit is a cross between a pomelo and a sweet orange? It has a slightly bitter and tangy flavor.

Grapefruits got their name because they grow in grape-like clusters on the tree. There are many grapefruit varieties, which range in sweetness and acidity. All grapefruits share a leathery rind, pith lining, and segmented pulp ranging in color from pale yellow to red. Commercial growers have successfully improved the fruit's natural sweetness and reduced the number of seeds in recent years.

The identity of a grapefruit is not necessarily based on the color of its skin, which ranges from yellow to pinkish-yellow, but is rather derived from the color of the fruit's flesh. The three major types of grapefruit are white, pink, and red varieties. White grapefruit is pale yellow citrus that's a bit more tart than pink or red-hued varieties. Pink grapefruits are sweeter than white but not as sweet as red varieties. Red grapefruit has a darker pink-red hue and tastes sweeter than the other two. A general rule of thumb is that the sweeter varieties have a darker red flesh.

Fresh grapefruit is available year-round, with a peak season in the winter through spring. Grapefruits are grown in Florida, Texas, California, and Arizona.

Grapefruits are a terrific source of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients to help the body ward off diseases and promote overall health. One-half grapefruit, measuring approximately 3 3/4" in diameter, has 52 calories. Grapefruit is an excellent source of vitamin C, providing nearly 64% of your daily needs in a single serving. It's also an excellent source of beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A, providing 28% of your daily needs. Grapefruit provides small amounts of certain minerals, such as potassium, calcium, and magnesium.

When selecting grapefruit, look for an outer skin that is smooth, shiny, and firm yet spongy to the touch. The fruit should be heavy for its size, indicating greater juice content. A good grapefruit will have a pleasant, almost flower-like aroma.

Store whole grapefruits at room temperature for one week or under refrigeration for three weeks. Wrap halved grapefruit with plastic wrap and store it in the fruit drawer of your fridge. Cut segments can be stored in an airtight container in the fridge.

To wash a grapefruit, rinse it under cold running water, use a vegetable brush to scrub the surface gently, and then rinse again with cold water before drying with a clean towel. Even if you don't plan to eat the grapefruit peel, washing is important to prevent dirt and bacteria transfer to the flesh.

This tangy citrus can star in culinary creations. Grapefruits have a sweet-tart flavor with a juicy nature that is well-suited for fresh and cooked applications. Grapefruits are great in both sweet and savory recipes. Beyond fresh applications, grapefruits are often used to add acidity to roasted meats, and the flesh can be juiced and used to flavor sauces and glazes.

Grapefruit and grapefruit juice are known to interact with some medications, so they need to be consumed with caution. Patients taking medication should speak to their doctor or pharmacist before consuming grapefruit or grapefruit-containing products.

You may find that you like grapefruit enough to make it a regular part of your diet. Grapefruit's bright and zingy flavor brings a lot of excitement to meals.