

The Golden Orbs are Ripe! Sweet Oranges Part I.

Citrus is definitely in season! I bit without constraint into the most perfect orange I have ever tasted, attributing the good taste to the fact it was 12:30 am in the morning, my eyes awake and belly hungry.

Dark and silent except for the hum of the refrigerator, it was good to try something unexpected. Oranges picked from the tree of a my parents old gardener, I was infatuated by the splendid flavor of the golden orb.

The orange was medium sized, thin skinned like a Valencia but it peeled and sectioned easily like a navel. The impetus to know what kind it was the spark that produced this article.

Now, imagine what it would be like to be as smart as David Karp, the renowned “fruit detective” who is purported to spend a lot of time in the Central Valley studying fruit. With a clandestine or humble past, depending on how you look at it, he is now recognized as an authority or fruit expert. He is not an expert in the University of California way, but as a self-made, eccentric, street-wise fruit lover. Incidentally, he caught the notice of LA and NY Times as a food writer, specializing of course, in fruit.

Mr. Karp, as mentioned in the afternoon show called California Heartland, is purported to have well-honed taste buds. For example, he can taste a fruit and if the fruit is crossed, be able to identify by the two crossed types, presumably by the taste, texture, and color.

The best I can do, however, is introduce readers to the recommended varieties of citrus, the characteristics of each kind and best use of specific varieties. I can also direct you to the Agricultural advisors in our community or perhaps, Mr. Fruitbud himself. And along with the facts, weave in some citrus history.

This subject does not occupy a wide chapter in my head. It does, however, occupy a wide chapter in my Master Gardener Handbook. At first glance, shuffling through the text, the information appeared daunting. It has since been condensed to elevate interest and improve digestion.

Varieties of recommend citrus including sweet, sour oranges, lemons, grapefruit, limes, sour-acid mandarins, mandarins, mandarin hybrids, tangelo, tangor, kumquat, limequat, orangquat, pummelo and citron. Citrus articles have been broken down into Part I and Part II, and hopefully, there will not be a need to produce a Part III.

The Navel Orange, so named for their "belly button," according to my source, but the source does not say who the clever originator of the name was. Humph!

The most widely accepted theory is that sweets originated in China, finding their way to California via Catholic missionaries. Sweets are a large seedless, juicy fruit, with thick skins that make it easy to peel and section for eating. The Cara Cara resembles a regular Navel, but the inside is a gorgeous deep salmon color, sugary and juicy. This unique variety originated at the Hacienda Cara Cara in Venezuela in the early 1970s, and are relatively new to the San Joaquin.

Valencia, was the first variety of sweet orange introduced into California. It is considered the worlds most important orange. The first orange tree introduced to California still exists and attracts tourists to Riverside, CA.

“Believed to be of Spanish origin, this variety actually became of interest in the Azores and is almost certainly of old Portuguese origin. The rind is thin and leathery, the interior bright orange, with a high juice content and sweet flavor. Valencias typically have 2-4 seeds per fruit.” This information came from the Bouquet of Fruit web site www.bouquetofruits.com, and informational web site that focuses on fruit of the San Joaquin Valley.

Sweet Oranges (*Citrus sinensis*) the most significant citrus crop worldwide, with a taste different from sour and blood oranges. These oranges have had an important role in the development of CA. and continues to be a major player in the CA. agricultural economy.

- Lane Late. Matures: Jan-May.
- Robertson Navel: fruit smaller and earlier than. Fruit matures: Nov-Apr.
- Shamouti: Mid season seedless from Israel. Fruit matures: Jan-Apr.
- Skaggs Bonanza: Bears fruit at an early age. Fruit matures: Nov-Apr.
- Trovita: Mid season eating and juice orange. Bears heavy on alternative years. Fruit matures Feb-Apr.
- Valencia: Highly juicy pulp, stores well on tree. New improved varieties know as Delta, Midnight and Rhode Red. Fruit matures Feb-Aug.
- Washington Navel, Lge. Seedless, not juiced commercially. Good for the home gardener. Fruit matures Nov-Apr.

Blood Oranges (*Citrus sinensis*) Important commercially in the Mediterranean, but not in the U.S. Many varieties popular worldwide. Red blush on rind may not indicate internal flesh color, which is deepest in hot, interior regions. A gourmet's citrus, having rich orange flavor with raspberry overtones.

- Moro: Fruit deep red, nearly seedless. Juice is almost burgundy in color. Productive, medium sized fruit. Fruit matures Dec-Apr.
- Sanguinelli: Rosy-skinned makes plant decorative. Most popular blood orange in Spain. Sweet-tart in flavor. Fruit matures Jan-Mar.

- Tarocco: An Italian variety, less productive than Moro, but deep red fruit are larger with good flavor. Rind bluish and has few seeds. Fruit matures Jan-Mar.

Enjoy the citrus season. More information coming your way soon.

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