



*Grapefruit and rosemary make an unusual but exciting match in this not-too-sweet cake. The finished cake is flipped upside down to show off the pretty sections of grapefruit.*

Photos: Mark Thomas

# Citrus Fruits Brighten Dessert

Oranges, grapefruits, lemons, and limes—  
in season and at their best now—wake up winter dishes

BY ANDREW MACLAUHLAN

Citrus fruits evoke sun-kissed climates, which may be why I especially enjoy them during the gray days of winter. Baking with citrus fruits—oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes, and tangerines are the most common—offers a great change of pace this time of year when I've had my fill of apple and pear desserts. I also find the tart, acidic nature of citrus refreshing at the end of a meal, especially a heavy winter dinner.

Because of their acidity, citrus fruits work great in baking; their tart flavors overcome the sometimes eggy nature of cakes, custards, and soufflés. The challenge when cooking with citrus fruits is finding a proper balance between sweet and tart, which is why the right amount of sugar in recipes is very important.

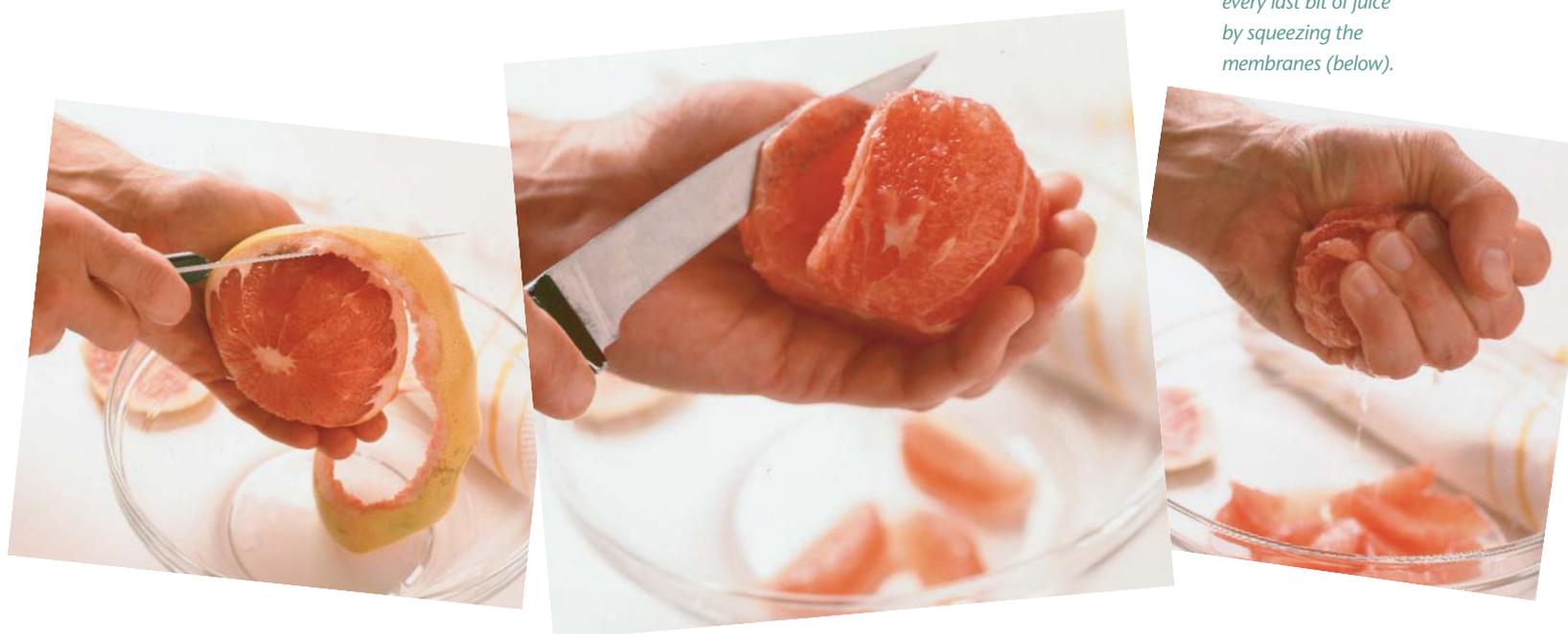
I'm always experimenting with wonderful ways to enjoy citrus fruits, including pairing them with herbs and spices to create complex yet pleasing taste sensations (see sidebar on p. 50). For example, lemon tart, one of my favorite desserts, pairs well with dried cherries enlivened with brandy, black pepper, and basil. A grapefruit cake scented with rosemary may seem a little unusual, but when you smell the heady aroma of the cake baking, you'll want a piece immediately. (See recipes on pp. 48–50.) But before you bake with citrus, you must choose the best fruit.

## HOW TO TELL IF AN ORANGE IS A LEMON: SEASONALITY AND SELECTION

During the winter, citrus fruits are at their sweetest, juiciest, and most flavorful. These fruits are ideal for

## CUTTING CITRUS SECTIONS

*For pretty and neat citrus sections, use a sharp knife to peel the fruit (left). Then cut along the dividing membranes of the sections towards the center of the fruit, removing the whole, peeled sections as you go (middle). Get every last bit of juice by squeezing the membranes (below).*



winter desserts when other common dessert fruits, such as berries, peaches, and plums, aren't available.

**For the juiciest fruits, choose those that are heaviest for their size.** Weight indicates content, so heft and good body are signs that the fruit is full of juice. Lighter, less firm fruits are likely to be dry.

**Seasonality also affects flavor.** Oranges may blossom and mature year-round, but they peak from November to May, and the brightly colored blood orange is available only from December to April. The peak season for grapefruit is slightly longer than oranges, from late fall to late spring. Lemons grow year-round with little variation in fragrance and taste, but limes are best during winter and late spring. Different varieties of tangerines appear from November to April.

**Color is a less dependable criterion for selecting citrus.** Contrary to their name, oranges may be green or yellow when fully ripe, sweet, and juicy. Ripe grapefruit may be greenish yellow, while pink grapefruit may have a pinkish or ruby-red tinge.

Color can be a little more telling for lemons and limes. Greenish lemons tend to be more acidic and sour; yellow ones are slightly sweeter. Less mature limes are green, and fully mature ones are yellow. Tangerines and kumquats turn deep orange when ripe.

#### USING THE PARTS OF THE WHOLE

One of the nice things about citrus fruits is that nearly every part of the fruit—the rind, the flesh, and the juice—can be used to add flavor to desserts.

**Zest adds a bright burst of citrus flavor** to fresh-cut fruit, compotes, cakes, and custards. For zest, use only the colored part of the rind, not the white pith. Make fresh zest by grating the rind on a fine grater or by peeling it into strips. For a sweeter alternative,

candy the zest (see photos below). I like to add candied zest to sorbets, ice creams, cakes, tarts, and mousses.

**To cut fruit into sections, use a sharp knife** to cut away the peel and pith. Then, holding the fruit over a bowl to catch any juice, cut along the dividing membranes of the sections towards the center of the fruit, removing the whole peeled sections as you go (see photos p. 47). Use citrus sections in salads, compotes, or layered desserts, or bake them into cakes and custards.

**Use flavorful citrus juice** as the base for sorbets, ice creams, or ices, or reduce it and add sugar to make a light sauce.

Finally, thin slices of whole citrus fruits, with or without the peel, make pretty garnishes for cakes, pies, and tarts.

The tart flavors of citrus overcome the sometimes eggy nature of cakes, custards, and soufflés.

#### MAKING CANDIED ZEST

*Zest the fruit with a peeler, which will make large strips that you can use whole or cut into julienne (below left). Blanch the zest in water for 10 minutes, drain, and blanch again for another 10 minutes. Simmer the blanched zest in syrup (made from equal parts of sugar and water) until translucent, 30 to 45 minutes. Drain the candied zest and use it immediately, or refrigerate it in its syrup for up to two weeks.*



#### Grapefruit Upside-Down Cake with Rosemary

Ruby Red grapefruit looks especially pretty on this cake. Nut, flour, and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups and tablespoons). Use either measurement. *Yields one 10-inch cake; serves twelve.*

**8 oz. (2 cups) slivered almonds, toasted**  
**2 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh rosemary**  
**2 Tbs. honey**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**12 oz. (24 Tbs.) unsalted butter**  
**2 cups sugar**  
**4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour**  
**10 large egg whites**  
**2 grapefruit, peel and pith removed, sectioned and drained on a paper towel**

In a food processor, pulverize the toasted almonds to a fine powder and set aside. Finely chop 1 Tbs. of the rosemary. In a small bowl, stir together the finely chopped rosemary, the honey, and the vanilla and set aside.

In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, melt the butter with the remaining 1 Tbs. rosemary. Cook until the butter begins to brown and has a nutty, slightly smoky aroma, about 10 min.; don't let it burn. Cool to room temperature.

Butter the bottom and side of a 10-inch round spring-form pan with a 3-inch rim. Line the bottom with kitchen parchment; butter the parchment and dust it lightly with additional sugar.

In a large bowl, mix the sugar, flour, and almonds. In another bowl, beat the egg whites to soft peaks. Strain the butter into the dry ingredients. Add the honey mixture; mix thoroughly. Fold in the egg whites until incorporated.





*A hint of allspice adds a little mystery to caramelized oranges and chocolate mousse. Serve the oranges while warm to contrast with the cool, smooth mousse.*

Heat the oven to 350°F. Arrange the grapefruit sections in one layer on the bottom of the cake pan. Pour the batter over the fruit. Bake until the cake is well risen, firm on top, and a toothpick stuck into the center comes out clean, 65 to 75 min. You may want to put a piece of foil on the oven's lower shelf to catch any drips.

Cool the pan on a rack for 15 min. Set a serving plate over the cake pan and invert the cake onto the plate. Gently lift off the pan. Slice and serve warm.

### **Caramelized Allspice Oranges with Dark-Chocolate Mousse**

Because the mousse needs to chill before serving, you may want to have it ready before you cook the oranges. *Serves eight.*

**FOR THE ORANGES:**  
 5 navel oranges  
 ¾ cup sugar



*A new approach to the classic match of lemon and cherries: the heat of the pepper-spiked dried cherry sauce complements the cool, sour lemon custard.*

1½ tsp. ground allspice  
 Pinch salt  
 ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

**FOR THE MOUSSE:**

¾ cup warm water  
 8 oz. high-quality bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled  
 1½ cups heavy cream, whipped to soft but firm peaks  
 ½ tsp. ground cinnamon

*Pistachios, chocolate shavings, or whipped cream to garnish, if desired*

**To caramelize the oranges**—Remove the zest from one of the oranges, cut it into thin strips, and set aside. Remove the peel and pith from all the oranges. Working over a bowl to catch the juice, cut the oranges into sections. After all the sections are removed, squeeze the membranes to extract their juice. Discard the membranes; reserve the juice and sections separately.

In a large saucepan, melt the sugar over medium heat. Cook, stirring and shaking the pan often, until the sugar turns a dark amber color. Carefully pour the reserved orange juice into the pan. Continue stirring as the mixture bubbles until the sugar dissolves completely. Add the orange sections, allspice, salt, pepper, and zest. Bring to a simmer and cook for 2 min. Remove from the heat.

**To make the mousse**—Whisk the hot water into the cooled melted chocolate. Cool completely. Fold the whipped cream and cinnamon into the chocolate until thoroughly combined. Fold carefully and don't overmix or the cream may go flat. Chill for at least 15 min.

**To assemble**—Put the warm oranges and their syrup in dessert bowls or goblets. Top with a scoop of chocolate mousse. Garnish with pistachios, chocolate shavings, or whipped cream, if desired.

### **Lemon Tart with Dried Sour Cherries**

Flour and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups and tablespoons). Use either measurement. *Yields one 10-inch tart; serves ten to twelve.*

**FOR THE SHORT-DOUGH CRUST:**

9 oz. (2 cups) flour  
 ¼ cup sugar  
 Pinch salt  
 6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into pieces  
 1 whole egg  
 1 egg, separated

*(Ingredient list continues on next page)*

## DELICIOUS—AND SOMETIMES UNEXPECTED—FLAVOR PARTNERS FOR CITRUS

I think citrus pairs well with lots of with ingredients. Some of my suggestions may seem familiar, others less so. Try adapting them to your favorite recipes.

◆ **Sweet oranges are excellent with bittersweet chocolate**, as in a dark-chocolate cake with blood-orange sauce. Rich, intense coffee flavorings are also complemented by sweet, fruity oranges. Nutmeg, cloves, allspice, black pepper, cumin, and anise enhance and add complexity to oranges. I like to pair oranges and pistachios, as the nut's rich, luxurious flavor holds up well to



the sweet, acidic citrus, but almost any type of nut works well with orange. Basil also pairs well with orange.

◆ **Grapefruit and caramel are a perfect match.** The sharp bitterness of the grapefruit is tempered by the smoky sweetness of cooked sugar. Good spice foils for grapefruit are cinnamon, caraway, and rosemary.

◆ **The bright tanginess of lemon revives the full, complex flavors of dried fruits**, such as Black Mission figs, dried cherries, or dried blueberries. The nutty smokiness of black pepper is a wonderful way to enhance lemon, pairing sensations of the cool, sour citrus with a touch of heat from the pepper. Both mint and basil complement the brightness of lemon.

◆ **Limes are excellent with tropical fruits, especially papaya.** Fresh papayas sprinkled with lime juice is a traditional dessert in the tropics. Or, for something slightly more complex, try a tropical fruit compote with lime sorbet or ice cream.

### FOR THE LEMON CUSTARD:

6 lemons  
6 eggs  
¾ cup *crème fraîche*  
1 cup sugar

### FOR THE DRIED-CHERRY SAUCE:

3 cups dried cherries  
¼ cup sugar  
1 cup water  
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp. cornstarch  
2 Tbs. kirsch or other brandy  
2 leaves fresh basil, chopped

**To make the short dough**—Sift the flour, sugar, and salt into a large bowl. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut the butter into the dry ingredients until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the whole egg and the egg yolk and mix with a wooden spoon until the dough comes together and the ingredients are thoroughly combined. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill at least 1 hour before rolling out. (This dough may be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen up to 2 weeks.)

**To blind-bake the tart crust**—Heat the oven to 375°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the chilled dough to a round ⅛ inch thick. Line a 10-inch tart pan with a 1-inch rim with the dough. Cover the dough with a double thickness of foil and fill with dry weights, such as dried beans. Bake the tart shell until dry but not beginning to brown, about 20 min. Meanwhile, lightly beat the egg white. Remove the foil and dry weights and lightly brush the crust with some of the beaten egg white. Return the crust to the oven, uncovered, and cook until no longer wet, about 5 min. (The egg-white glaze will seal the crust and keep it from turning soggy.)

**To make the custard**—Remove the zest from 2 lemons and chop it very fine. Juice all the lemons to get about 1¾ cups of juice. Combine the zest and juice. Whisk the eggs with the juice mixture.

Whisk together the *crème fraîche* and sugar. Add half the egg-juice mixture and whisk well. Add the remaining egg mixture and whisk until well combined. Pour into a heavy-based saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon. Don't let the mixture boil. Transfer the custard to a bowl, cover the surface with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming, and refrigerate until needed (up to 2 days).

**To assemble the tart**—Heat the oven to 300°F. Pour the lemon mixture into the tart shell and bake until the custard is set, about 25 min.

**To prepare the cherries**—In a saucepan over medium-low heat, combine the cherries, sugar, water, and pepper. Dissolve the cornstarch in the kirsch. Whisk the cornstarch mixture into the cherry mixture and simmer, stirring, until thickened, about 3 min. Stir in the basil.

Serve the tart at once or refrigerate it for up to 4 hours. To serve, surround each slice with some of the sauce.

---

*Andrew MacLauchlan, author of New Classic Desserts (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995) is the corporate pastry chef for the Coyote Cafés in Santa Fe, Austin, and Las Vegas, where there's usually a citrus dessert on the menu. ◆*