

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Having gift boxes of oranges and grapefruit shipped to family and friends 'up north' at Christmas time has been a Florida tradition. Tucked into the toe of a stocking, for many children those would be the only fresh oranges they got all year. For the giver they were easy gifts to have sent. For the receivers they were often an eagerly awaited treat.

They still are easy gifts to send. There are plenty of groves advertising their special gift boxes. You fill out the form, they pack and ship the fruit. Or if you have the trees in your back yard you can pack and ship your own. Wrap each fruit individually in paper and use enough packing material to keep them from shifting around in the box. You'd better send them overnight, or use one of the shipping services. That way they're less likely to end up sitting out or freezing solid on the way.

Besides the unbeatable taste of fresh squeezed juice, oranges provide a lot of nutrition too. You know there's plenty of vitamin C. Freshly squeezed juice gives us, in one cup, about 124 mg. Because vitamin C breaks down when it's exposed to light, heat or air, the longer juice sits the less vitamin C it has. It will still taste good, and there will be some vitamin C left, even after a week or two, but there won't be as much as when it was fresh.

Another vitamin in oranges and orange juice is folate. Orange juice is the best natural source of folate. Folate, or folic acid, is part of the family of B vitamins. An early recognized need for folate was for pregnant women. Those with diets low in folate

were much more likely to have babies with severe defects in their nervous system development. The March of Dimes made folate the center of much of their educational materials for many years. Eventually there was so much evidence of the benefit of folate for babies that now breads and cereals are fortified with folate for all of us. The number of babies being born with birth defects has gone down dramatically.

Now however it's beginning to look like folate fortification is important for all of us long, long after birth. New research seems to be telling us that people who have lots of folate in their diets are much less likely to get Alzheimer's disease. . . Some of them were eating foods high in folate, others were taking supplements. During three years of testing in people between the ages of 50 and 85, those who ate more folate-containing foods showed much less loss of mental sharpness. They were more able to remember lists, recognize shapes and do other mental exercises. They were more able to hold conversations and speak clearly than those people who were not getting as much folate

Another benefit of lots of folate is that it helps keep the levels of homocysteine down in our blood stream. High levels of homocysteine are a sign of higher risk for stroke. So more folate in the diet leads to lower risk of stroke. A severe lack of folate can cause anemia.

Besides oranges and orange juice, folate is also found in dark green leafy vegetables. The name folate is related to the word foliage, for leaves. Spinach, romaine lettuce and other dark leaves are good sources. It is also found in beef liver. But orange juice is much nicer for breakfast than liver or lettuce, don't you think?

If you still don't want to drink your OJ, you can take folate supplements. But don't take 2 or 3 multi-vitamins to get your 400 mg a day of folate. That would give you dangerous amounts of some other vitamins. Take a supplement of just folate.

Here's a recipe that won't provide much in the way of folate, but will give you a super orange-flavored gift to give for Christmas. It's a nice contrast to dark chocolate fudge, but just as sweet. Don't eat all of it yourself!

Snowy Christmas Orange Fudge

2 Tbsp butter or margarine

2 C sugar

3/4 C milk

1 Tbsp freshly squeeze orange juice

2 Tbsp freshly grated orange zest

1/2 C chopped almonds

In heavy saucepan melt butter over medium-low heat. Add sugar, milk and orange juice. Stir until sugar dissolves. Cover, boil 1 minute to dissolve sugar off sides of pan. Uncover and cook without stirring to soft ball stage (239° F on candy thermometer). Cool to lukewarm, about 45 minutes, without stirring. Stir in orange peel. Beat vigorously until mixture is no longer glossy and is getting very thick. Stir in almonds. Pour onto waxed paper or into waxed paper lined 8 x 8 inch cake pan. Cool until set. Cut into squares. Makes about 1 pound of fudge.

Note: for Lemon Fudge, omit juice, use 1 Tbsp lemon peel, and use walnuts instead of almonds. Follow same procedure.

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