

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

June 25, 2009

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Put a Little Zest in Your Menu**

Summer time in the South means it's lemonade time! Sweet, tart, cold, refreshing, fresh lemonade is a treat as well as a tradition. A few folks decide to be radical and go for limeade, but most of us stick to lemons. Beyond lemonade, we've had lemon pies, lemon pound cake, and lemon drop cookies. We might squeeze a bit of lemon juice into tea or onto fish. But that's the extent of many people's experience of lemons.

Now however, lemons and limes are going radical and showing up in lots of other foods. That can be a good thing for our diets. Both lemons and limes are good sources of vitamin C and other antioxidants. That means they can help protect us from various diseases, including some cancers. Have you ever used a squeeze of lemon juice to keep apples or bananas from turning brown? That's their antioxidant power in action, protecting the fruit from the oxidizing action of air.

British sailors in Colonial times were called 'limeys' because they kept barrels of limes on their sailing ships. Doling them out to the sailors along with their daily ration of grog kept the sailors from getting scurvy. Scurvy is the disease of not enough vitamin C. If you have scurvy you bruise easily, cuts don't heal and your gums bleed a lot. Eating their daily limes kept the British navy healthy.

Besides the vitamins and antioxidants, most citrus fruit also contain flavonoids, a group of phytonutrients that also seem to protect us from cancers and possibly other

diseases as well. Potassium is another ingredient in citrus fruits. While it's been known for a long time as part of the prescription for healthy bones, more recently potassium has been recognized as an important part of the balance to lower blood pressure.

A newly found protective ingredient in orange and lemon peel is D-limonene. This phytonutrient seems to be especially active in protecting us from skin cancer. Here in Florida that could be a real benefit. The trick is that, so far, it's only found in the skin, or zest, of oranges and lemons. It's not in the juice and not found if we just eat the segments.

One last benefit of using lemons or limes, the juice or the zest, is that it's good for improving the flavor of foods when we have to reduce the salt. Often the elderly will complain that their foods taste flat. We respond by adding salt. But our ability to taste salt is the last to go. It's the sweet-sour flavors that they're missing. Adding a squeeze of lemon or lime juice to a food will do more to improve its flavor than more salt will.

With all those benefits, and lively flavor too, it's great that lemons, limes and oranges are being used in so many more foods these days. Add some finely diced jalapeño pepper and a bit of red onion to a bowl of diced orange and lemon segments and you'll have refreshing salsa to top the chicken or chops on the grill. Use orange and lemon segments instead of apples for a Florida version of Waldorf salad.

Add some grated lemon or orange zest to the breakfast pancake batter. What a way to start the day! Marinate meat in a citrus, oil and herb mixture to tenderize the meat, improve the flavor and reduce the amount of carcinogens formed when it's grilled. Use lemon juice instead of vinegar in salad dressings. Keep a plate of fresh lemon or lime wedges on the table, instead of the salt shaker, to add flavor to meat, fish, beans,

vegetables and glasses of water.

Here's a recipe that does double duty. Use it as a salad dressing or as a marinade for meat, poultry or fish. Stored in a glass container it will keep for a week in the refrigerator. Use less pepper if you prefer.

Spicy Lime Sauce

3/4 cup fresh lime juice (4-5 limes)

1 tsp lime zest

1/2 cup honey

2 cloves garlic

1 small onion

4 sprigs fresh parsley

1/4 tsp Tabasco or other hot pepper sauce

Roll limes on the counter under your hand several times to release the juice. Scrape off enough zest from one lime before you juice them. Puree all ingredients except the parsley in blender until smooth. Add parsley and pulse briefly. Use as salad dressing or as a marinade. Makes about 1 cup.