

For the Love of Lemons

Written by Debbi Covington
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Nothing says “sunshine” like a lemon! The lemon is a symbol of tart refreshment; its color and fragrance lift our spirits before we even taste it.



Lemons, like salt, bring out the flavors of other ingredients and make everything taste fresher and brighter. They work wonders in savory dishes and truly shine in desserts. Just a squeeze of juice, a paper-thin slice, or a curl of zest adds a piquant zing, a tart edge and a lovely aroma. Lemon tastes good with almost everything! It marries well with all sorts of herbs and spices, berries and other fruits, spirits and liqueurs, and even edible flowers. There are three types of lemon: common, rough and sweet. The tart yellow ones that we buy at the grocery store are the most common lemons: egg-shaped Eureka's in the summer and Lisbon's in the fall. Rough lemons are used only as rootstock for other citrus. Sweet lemons are not really sweet, just less acidic. Meyer lemons, the small, round, thin-skinned variety, are considered sweet lemons. Always choose the freshest lemons. They should have lustrous, oily skins and be smooth and firm to the touch. Avoid blemished, bruised or wrinkled specimens. The thinner-skinned lemons usually contain more juice, and those with thicker skin tend to have more flavorful zest. For juice, look for a lemon that's heavy in the hand, one that feels heavy with juice. After choosing the perfect lemons, you'll need to store them properly. They'll last for up to 4 weeks in the refrigerator and for about a week to ten days at room temperature. All of the recipes this week are “lemon-scented.” Turn that old sourpuss, the lemon, into the most refreshing thing you've every tasted!

Lemon-Almond Iced Tea

3 quarts boiling water
8 tea bags
3/4 cup sugar
1 (12-ounce) can frozen lemonade concentrate, thawed
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon almond extract

Bring water to a boil. Remove from heat and add tea bags. Steep for 15 minutes. Remove tea bags. Add sugar and stir until dissolved. Add lemonade, vanilla , and almond extract. Chill. Serve over ice. Serves 12.

Mesclun Salad and Strawberries with Lemon-Mustard Vinaigrette

4 tablespoons lemon juice
1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon hot Chinese mustard
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 cup vegetable oil
7 cups mesclun salad or spring mix
1/2 cup pine nuts, toasted
3 cups fresh strawberries, sliced

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2 bunches green onions, sliced
1/3 cup Romano cheese, freshly grated
Black pepper, freshly ground

Combine first 7 ingredients in blender. Mix well. Toss salad greens with pine nuts, strawberries, and green onions. Toss with Lemon-Mustard Vinaigrette and Romano cheese. Top with freshly ground pepper. Serves 6.

Lemony Chicken Soup with Orzo

4 cups chicken broth
2 eggs, beaten
Juice from 1 lemon
3/4 cup orzo
1/2 cup chopped parsley
Salt
Pepper

Bring the chicken broth to a boil in a medium saucepan. Add orzo and cook until tender. Add chicken. Remove from heat. In a small bowl, combine lemon juice and eggs. Mix well. Add 1/3 cup of hot broth to lemon and egg mixture and mix well. Slowly add the lemon and egg mixture into the soup, taking care that the eggs don't curdle. Add chopped parley and salt and pepper to taste. Serves 4.

Broccoli with Lemon Dressing

1/4 cup lemon juice
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 tablespoon sugar
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon chopped onion
1 (12-ounce) bag fresh broccoli florets

Combine first 7 ingredients. Refrigerate several hours before serving. Steam broccoli florets. Shake dressing well and pour over freshly steamed broccoli. Serves 4 to 6.

New Potatoes with Lemon and Parsley

2 pounds new potatoes
1/4 cup butter
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1 teaspoon grated lemon rind
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon salt

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1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
Fresh parsley

Cover and cook potatoes in boiling water to cover 10 minutes or just until tender; drain. Combine butter and next 6 ingredients in a small saucepan; cook over medium heat, stirring until butter melts. Pour butter mixture over potatoes; toss gently to coat. Garnish with fresh parsley. Serves 6.

Lemon Chess Pie

2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon cornmeal
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup butter, melted
2 teaspoons grated lemon rind
1/4 cup lemon juice
1/4 cup milk
4 eggs
1 (9-inch) pastry shell, unbaked

Combine sugar, flour, cornmeal, and salt. Add butter, lemon rind, lemon juice, and milk; mix well. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Pour into pastry shell. Bake at 350 degrees for 50 minutes. Serves 6 to 8.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.