



REFLECTIONS & RECIPES

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There are a dozen lemons on the counter and two little boys in the kitchen. Tim is 8 months old and sitting safely in his walker. Jesse is four and has figured out how to use the walker like a scooter. Together they ricochet from vertical surface to surface, banging into appliances, cabinets, and furniture.

The walker has three levels of sturdy plastic “donuts” with Tim firmly planted in the middle. Even when there is direct impact, the walker bounces off the surface and both boys shriek with delight. It is loud and entertaining and surprisingly safe.

In the midst of this, we are making a lemon cake. The “we” is mostly me, as only Jesse can stand on a chair and add ingredients I’ve measured. He wields the rubber spatula and mixes with gusto as I firmly hold the bowl and dodge Tim careening into my lower half. He may not be walking yet, but that child can scoot!

Jesse takes a break from mixing, and I take advantage of his absence to juice a dozen lemons. Apparently, a dozen lemons are not enough to make the required cup of lemon juice called for in my recipe. I pack the boys up and we’re off to the market to buy more lemons.

Back home, the scooting/banging continues while I finish juicing enough lemons for the recipe. I’m so happy this task is complete! The sun is shining directly on the lemon juice and I hold the cup over the bowl, admiring the gleam of sunlight that bounces off the measuring cup.

This is the moment when the boys/scooter collide with me and the juice. This is the moment when the juice spills over the counter, the floor, Tim’s walker. This is the moment when I resist having a tantrum, manage not to cry, and give up on the idea of making a lemon cake.

Jesse is stomping lemon juice puddles. Tim is scooting his walker through, thoroughly coating the walker wheels. He’s heading towards what is left of the rug after two months of walker/scooter “fun.” I never made the cake. It was the very first time I put a video on, planted the boys in front of it, cleaned up and hoped that someday, there could be a lemon cake in my future.

And that future is my current life where lemon cakes are on regular rotation. Different weeks give me an opportunity to try making different cakes, most of which I give away. It’s all part of my baking delight, lemon fun, and it’s a joy for me that I’m happy to share with you. Each of these recipes uses varying amounts of lemon juice. Squish up something delicious. And be mindful as you admire your efforts. Surprises are often just around the bend.

Lemon Tips

1. Room temperature lemons are juicier than cold ones.
2. To get even more juice from the lemon, roll it on the counter, pressing firmly with the palm of your hand.
3. If you are going to zest (grate the peel for flavoring), do that before you juice the lemon.
4. Only zest the colored part of the peel. The pith (white part) is bitter and should be avoided.
5. Lemon zest mixed with granulated or confectioners' sugar adds more lemon flavor to the final product than lemon juice alone. You can make lemon sugar well in advance. The longer it sits, with an occasional shaking, the better it will be.
6. Wash and dry the lemon so you get more lemon flavor and less of whatever has settled on the surface. I prefer organic lemons for this purpose.
7. Meyer lemons, a mix between mandarins and regular lemons, are smaller, sweeter, with less pith and fewer seeds. If available, these are always my lemons of choice. Their peel, zested or in a marmalade, is fabulous.
8. Heavier lemons have more juice.

Simple Tahini-Lemon Sauce

I use this on salad, pour it over cooked vegetables and/or grains. It's simple, delicious, and versatile.

Ingredients:

- 4 medium-to-large cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- ½ cup tahini (stir it well before using)
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt
- Pinch of ground cumin (optional)
- 6 tablespoons water, more as needed to get a pourable consistency you like.



Preparation:

1. In a medium bowl, combine the garlic and lemon juice. Wait 10 minutes so the garlic can infuse the lemon juice. You can skip this step and just add crushed garlic, but it is smoother this way.
2. Pour the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into another medium bowl. Press the garlic solids with a spatula to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard the garlic. Or just use the crushed garlic in the juice.
3. Add the tahini, salt and cumin to the bowl. Whisk until mixed. Add water 2 tablespoons at a time, whisking after each addition until smooth. It may look curdled at first but keep adding water and mixing and all will be well. After about 6 tablespoons, you will have a creamy sauce.

Adaptations:

- Thin with more water for a more drizzly sauce.
- Add chopped herbs such as parsley, chervil, cilantro etc.
- Add more lemon juice for more tang.
- Use mashed roasted garlic instead of fresh.

Tim's Lemon Cookies (Adapted from Jamie of My Baking Addiction)

Makes about 2 dozen, depending on the size of the balls you roll.

Although he didn't like eating "things that grow," including anything lemon flavored when he was younger, these are my son Tim's most requested cookie. These are very lemony and chewy if you like that sort of thing. Easy to make, freeze, and impress.

Please read the recipe all the way through before making, so there's time to infuse the sugar for the cookies and for rolling them.

Ingredients:

- 2 3/4 cups all-purpose unbleached flour (I always use organic)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, room temperature
- Zest of one lemon for infusing both the cookie-making and rolling sugar. I use a microplane but you could also peel and finely chop as I do when making these cookies away from home). Remember to only grate the yellow skin and avoid the bitter white pith.)
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar infused with the grated zest of one (washed and towel-dried) lemon.
- 1 egg, room temperature
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon or vanilla extract
- 1/4 cup (4 tablespoons) fresh lemon juice, seeds removed
- 1/2 cup sugar for rolling cookies (infuse this with zest)

Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 cookie sheets with parchment paper or silpat mats.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, stir together flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt. Set aside.
3. Using a mixer, food processor, or by hand, beat the butter and sugar until smooth and fluffy.
4. Add and mix the egg, lemon or vanilla extract, and lemon juice.
5. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients.
6. Roll rounded teaspoonfuls of dough into balls and roll in sugar. I use a purple-handled 3 tablespoon cookie scoop. Children with clean hands love to help with this step. Place on lined cookie sheets about 1 1/2 inches apart.
7. Bake 8 to 10 minutes in the preheated oven, or until lightly browned.
8. Let stand on cookie sheet for a couple of minutes so they're firm enough to transfer to a cooling rack.



Silver Palate Lemon Chicken

Fabulous for family or company.

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces* (OR bone-in parts you prefer OR 6 bone-in chicken thighs, which is what I prefer)
- 1 cup fresh squeezed lemon juice (see lemon tips below) Don't use bottled lemon juice. Please.
- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more if needed.
- 1 heaping teaspoon paprika
- salt and pepper as needed.
- Neutral oil such as avocado or canola oil as needed.
- 1 heaping tablespoon lemon zest
- 1 heaping tablespoon brown sugar
- 1/4 cup chicken stock
- Splash of white wine (optional)
- 1 teaspoon lemon extract (optional)
- 1 lemon thinly sliced for garnish (use the middle part, not either of the ends)



Preparation:

1. Combine the chicken pieces and lemon juice in a bowl just large enough to hold them comfortably. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator overnight or early the morning of cooking, turning every few hours.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
3. Rinse and dry the chicken pieces. Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Set aside.
4. In a brown bag add the flour, paprika, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon black pepper. Shake to combine. Add the chicken pieces, 2-3 at a time, and shake to evenly coat in flour. Shake off excess flour and transfer to a plate.
5. Add enough oil to coat the bottom of a large skillet by 1". Heat over medium-high heat. Pan-fry the chicken, 2-3 pieces at a time, until well browned and crisped. This takes about 10 minutes per batch. Arrange the browned chicken pieces in a single layer in a large shallow baking dish.
6. Combine the brown sugar, lemon zest, and a 1/4 teaspoon black pepper. Evenly sprinkle the mix over the chicken pieces.
7. Mix the stock and lemon extract (if using) and pour around the chicken pieces. If using wine, add a splash or two. Set a thin lemon slice on top of each piece of chicken.
8. Bake until fully cooked, about 50 minutes.