

When life gives you lemons ...

Make limoncello! And other citrus-y treats

It's citrus season in Chico, with all the trees dropping or ready to drop their flavorful goodness for us to enjoy. It can be intimidating, however, to figure out what to do with so many lemons—or mandarins, oranges, etc.

A few weeks ago, a woman in one of my Facebook groups offered boxes full of Meyer lemons from her yard and I jumped on it, promising some edible treats in return. First I wanted to make limoncello, an Italian liqueur; I'd made it last year to rave results. I didn't want to waste the flesh of the lemons, however, so I decided to also try my hand at lemon curd. Between the two, it was time-consuming and labor-intensive, but oh so worth it. (I refrigerated the lemons for a few days between projects, which helped.)

So, go out and pick a few—or a lot—and make some homemade lemon treats yourself!

Limoncello

- 10 lemons
- 1 liter strong vodka (Everclear or 100 proof recommended)
- 3 cups white sugar
- 4 cups water

First, wash—even scrub—your lemons. Then zest them. This is by far the most time-consuming part. I recommend using a veggie peeler to carefully remove the rind, avoiding as much pith as possible (pith makes it bitter). I had more lemons than I could count, so I bought a couple 1.75-liter bottles of vodka and split the rinds between them. Some recipes call for pouring the mixture into a separate container, but I just emptied a half cup or so of the vodka from each bottle and dropped the peels right in. Let sit for at least a week at room temperature or below (not in the refrigerator).

When ready, create a simple syrup by adding sugar to water in a saucepan and bringing to a boil for 15 minutes, or until sugar has incorporated. While mixture is cooling, strain vodka and remove peels. Once syrup is cool, add to vodka. Let sit for two to three weeks at room temperature or below.

Once ready, freeze and then enjoy! Also makes great gifts.



A mini lemon meringue pie made with fresh lemon curd.

Lemon peels steeped in vodka, the first step to making homemade limoncello.



- Lemon curd**
(adapted from a recipe by David Lebovitz)
- 1/2 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
 - lemon zest, as desired
 - 1/3 cup sugar
 - 2 large egg yolks
 - 2 large eggs
 - pinch of salt
 - 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed

Squeeze lemons into a bowl, using a strainer to keep seeds out. I had enough juice to quadruple the recipe, with some left over that I poured into ice cube trays for later use. After using the peels for limoncello, I saved about one lemon's worth and zested that, adding the zest to the juice. More zest equals a brighter lemon flavor.

In a large metal bowl, add the sugar, salt, eggs and yolks to the lemon juice and whisk. (I eventually switched to a hand mixer, as recipe calls for about 10-15 minutes of whisking.)

Place sauce pan with water on stove and bring to a boil. Set heat to simmer and place metal bowl on top (to create a double boiler). Add butter cubes to the mix and whisk until melted. Bring heat up to medium and continue to whisk until mixture thickens and begins to hold its shape. Take off heat, press through a strainer to remove the zest, and cover with plastic wrap, ensuring plastic touches curd. Allow to cool. Enjoy!

I used the curd to make a batch of mini lemon meringue pies, which were delicious, and bottled the rest. It'll keep about a week in the fridge or a year in the freezer. I gifted one bottle to the woman who gave me the lemons and froze the rest. □



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