

tastebuds

chef Larry Jones



It's sour but lemon is lovely

Pucker up, sweetie. With summer beginning to feel more like a sauna, I thought it would be a great time to pass along some basic information and useful hints about something that's too sour to be eaten straight but, when combined with other foods, imparts excellent flavor. The lemon.

We're not talking cars here, although in all honesty, I have driven a few lemons in my relatively short lifespan. The lemon originated somewhere in Southeast Asia between India and South China. Some botanists suspect that the lemon is a natural cross between the citron and an unidentified but closely related species of citrus fruit. At one time, lemons and citros were interchangeable and called Persian apples by the ancient Greeks.

Lemons were grown in Italy as early as the first century A.D. because they are depicted in certain Roman artworks of that period. After the barbarians invaded Italy in the fourth century, wide destruction of lemon orchards virtually stopped all lemon agriculture, until they again popped up in Spain around the start of the 11th century. Columbus brought lemons to Haiti in 1493, and shortly thereafter the Spanish explorers including Vasco de Leon brought them to Florida in 1513.

By 1600 some of the naval physicians of the major world powers were aware that daily sips of lemon juice would prevent outbreaks of scurvy among the sailors of long sea voyages. Lemons were used because they would stay fresh for up to six months, whereas oranges usually spoiled within three weeks.

THE CALIFORNIA lemon industry began shortly after the gold rush of 1849 when the miners also used the lemon to prevent scurvy due to the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables. By the time the railroads were put into place in the 1880s, transportation to populated East cities made California the world's leader in producing lemons.

In all honesty, though, yearly titles flip-flop back and forth between the California lemon industry and the Italian lemon industry as to the world's leader in lemon production. More than 5 million metric tons are produced yearly worldwide.

More than half the North American lemon crop is produced with a major portion being converted into lemon juice and frozen concentrates. The peel, pulp and seeds are sold throughout North America and used to make lemon oil, lemon wax, fragrances, bioflavonoids (vitamin substances) and cattle feed ingredients.

Yours truly likes to make real lemonade (see recipe below) and frequently uses lemon juice in place of vinegar when making salad dressings. With the industry leaning away from wood cutting boards toward the newer (and harder to clean) polyethylene, I've taken to rubbing a cut lemon over my chopping board at least once a week.

I'm not trying to sound like helpful Heloise, but my bathroom wallpaper was getting a little moldy in the corners (no fan) and the use of bleach would have whitened the paper so I took some bottled lemon juice and poured it onto a sheet of kitchen parchment paper over the fine grating edge of a hand grater. The rind was easily removed from the paper and the grater never needed a wash as the parchment was never cut but acted as a grating surface itself.

So if you like lemons like I do, try these great recipes, and since you're already pucker up, pass it along to someone you love. Bon Appetit.

HOMEMADE LEMONADE
Makes a little less than 2 quarts
2 cups sugar
½ cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1 quart water

Boil sugar in water for 5 minutes. Cool. Stir in lemon juice. Serve over ice.

LEMON MERINGUE PIE
1 ½ tablespoons shortening
8 tablespoons flour
1 cup sugar

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Star fruit, red banana, kiwano, cherimoya, mango and passion fruit are a few of the many exotic fruits that are becoming popular. Some 20 — or more than 100 exotic fruits — are available at markets in metropolitan Detroit.

Exotic fruits

Summer months great time to try them

By Gert Rinschler
special writer

GROCERY SHOPPING certainly can be intimidating. You want to try something new, keep up with current food trends. So, you decide to add some zip to the family fruit salad with a new taste sensation such as guava or mango, and what happens?

You get to the register only to find out the cashier doesn't recognize the item. Actually, she doesn't know whether it's a fruit or a vegetable, and she doesn't know the price or the computerized scan number.

While waiting for the produce department to call back with the answers, you wonder . . . Maybe this isn't worth the effort? And the most difficult task still lies ahead — convincing the family to try it.

If the best form of education is experience, the timing is perfect, since June and July are prime fruit months. Although most exotic fruits are available year-round, other fruits that complement them are at their best during the summer months.

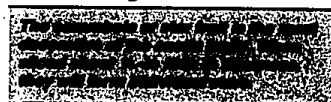
There are 100-plus exotic fruits in the United States, but only 20 are available locally. Here are some of my personal favorites, which are in season and warrant investigation. Along with storage and shopping hints, I've included recipes to help you successfully integrate these great new tastes into your cooking repertoire.

THE ASIAN PEAR or apple pear looks just like an apple, with pear-colored skin. This is a crunchy fruit which, depending on the variety, can be full of juice. If you've tried them once and were disappointed, give it another try. They can be poached in a light syrup, but generally take longer to

cook than regular pears. They have a good refrigerator shelf life. When eaten raw they have a light sweetness with a lovely aroma. In selecting, look for a distinctive aroma with firm skin free of bruises. They do not soften as they ripen and are available all year.

THE CARAMBOLA or star fruit is the most decorative of the exotic fruits. Grown in Florida, it is now restricted in California because of its companion, the fruit fly. These delicate fruits are not as versatile as the others. The skin is slightly waxy and pale yellow in color with ridges. When sliced about ¼" — ½" thick, they will form individual stars. As it ripens, the pale green strips along the ridges will turn brown. Don't buy them with brown patches; that means they are past their prime. There are two varieties of the star fruit: sweet and a sour. Check with the grocer before buying, since they are never labeled by variety. This fruit does not peel easily. If you don't want to eat the skin, it's easier to remove it after it's been sliced. Carambola make a beautiful garnish for any entree plate as well as fruit bowls and desserts. It can also be pureed for a chilled fruit mousse recipe or frozen ice or sorbet.

THE FEJOA (pronounced fay-jo-a) or pineapple guava is often mistakenly marked as a guava. This is by far one of the most aromatic fruits. The fruit industry guide books describe it as a tangy, pineapple flavor with spearmint overtones, and I guess that's as good a description as any. Just a bit larger than a jumbo-size egg, the fruit has a olive-green stem with a slightly bumpy texture. There are two crops, September through January (California) and April through June (New Zealand). As these ripen, they soften,



resembling a ripe plum. They're a tart fruit, which often requires a little extra sugar when being incorporated into a recipe. The fejoa can be used in fruit salads or poached in a sugar syrup. It also can be pureed as a fruit base for a mousse, soufflé or cake. Before using, peel the skin and scoop out the pulp in the center.

THE TRUE GUAVAS have a somewhat different shape than the fejoa. To begin with, they are larger in size with a yellow-green or pale yellow skin. There is one variety that resembles a pear. The taste and texture vary from variety to variety. I prefer the fejoa as a fruit base. The guava is best when used for jelly.

NO ARTICLE about exotic fruit is complete without mentioning the kiwi. Although no longer considered to be exotic, the kiwi became the signature fruit during America's Colonial Nouveau era. This is still a great fruit. Its brilliant green color dazzles any plate, complementing the vivid reds and purples of the berry family. Right now, the kiwis arriving in the market are very large. The kiwi is grown in a great variety of sizes. The skin should be peeled before eating, and the flavor is best when served chilled.

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SALADE DE FROMAGE ET MANGO

Serves 4

2 medium-size mangoes, peeled and sliced into strips ½" x 4"
¼ to 1 pound fresh goat cheese
1 small head bibb lettuce
4 leaves of radicchio

Vinaigrette:
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons wine or champagne vinegar
salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons crème fraîche (or 1 tablespoon heavy cream mixed with 1 tablespoon sour cream)
¼ teaspoon basil

Garnish:
2 tablespoons chopped chives
watercress or Italian parsley leaves

Mask goat cheese. Mix dressing in blender or jar and taste to correct seasonings. Arrange bibb lettuce on each individual serving plate. Place a dollop of cheese mixture in the

center. Arrange four or five mango strips as if petals on a flower. Add radicchio leaves in between for color. Pour a few tablespoons of dressing over the top and garnish with chives and watercress leaves.

NOUVELLE FRUIT TART

Serves 8

A favorite summer dessert at our house is an open-face fruit tart. Select from berries, kiwi, mango and papaya and create your own color plate. I've included a basic pastry crust recipe. When the crust is cool, fill with the Crème Anglaise recipe below or whip a cup of heavy cream and sweeten with sugar and/or a few tablespoons of fruit liqueur.

If using the heavy cream filling, it should only be assembled at serving time. When making the custard or Crème Anglaise filling, the tart can be put together a few hours before serving. Be careful to wipe the berries gently with a cloth or swabbing to remove the excess juice which may run. This tart does not need to be glazed but can be, if so desired.

BAKED BLIND CRUST
An all-purpose dessert pastry crust for open faced tarts

Makes one 9"-crust
This recipe can be made by hand or in a food processor
1 ½ cups flour
pinch salt
8 tablespoons butter, chilled, diced
1 teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon heavy cream
2-4 tablespoons chilled water

To make by hand: place flour and salt on a counter top. Add sugar and salt. Make a well in the center of the mound. Add diced butter.

Goat cheese, mangoes combine for zingy salad

Break up the butter pieces with hands, blending with the flour until the texture is coarse. Add liquid one tablespoon at a time, fluffing the mixture with your hands to equally distribute the liquid.

Gather the dough into a ball on the counter. Using the flat part of your palm near the wrist, push the dough to flatten and flatten on the counter using ¼ of the dough at a time. (If you can manage this technique the dough will be flatter. Gather the dough back and wrap in paper and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Keep in mind, the more the dough is worked the tougher it becomes.)

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