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Italian prune plums are the start of this tart built on a lemon shortbread crust.

Lemons, plums make a sweet combination

By **GRETCHEN MCKAY**
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

I’m a happy camper this time of year, and no, not because kids are going back to school.

August is when Italian plums come to market. To find them piled high in wooden pint baskets at a local market is like winning the lottery.

Slightly tart and a little more egg-shaped than a common plum, “prune plums” develop a rich, sugary-sweet flavor and jammy texture when cooked. That means they’re terrific not just for jam but also in pies, crumbles, cakes and tarts. Plus, since they’re a free stone fruit, the pits come out without any trouble. What cook doesn’t like that?

I use pint after pint of the purple fruit when it’s in season in one of my all-time favorite desserts: The New York Times’ famed plum tart. This year, though, that recipes has some competition from Fine Cooking. Its recipe pairs prune plums tossed in sugar and lemon zest with a lemon shortbread crust that requires no rolling — you simply pat it into the pan.

I made it even more delicious by brushing homemade peach jam on the tart shell before adding the plum filling. The entire dessert disappeared in less than a day, because my husband and I ate it for breakfast and also as a late-night snack.

A ripe plum should smell sweet and fruity, and feel heavy. Don’t worry about the spots of powdery white known as bloom — the fruit secretes it to protect against bugs and bacteria, and it’s actually a sign of freshness. It’s harmless and edible.

PLUM TART WITH LEMON SHORTBREAD CRUST

- For filling**
- 1/3 cup plus 1/2 tablespoon granulated sugar, divided
 - 1 tablespoon cornstarch
 - Pinch of kosher salt
 - 1/4 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
 - 14 ripe Italian plums (about 1 1/2 pounds), each pitted and sliced into slender wedges
- For tart shell**
- 8 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes; plus more softened for the pan
 - 1 large egg yolk
 - 2 teaspoons firmly packed, finely grated lemon zest
 - 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 - 1 cup and 3 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour; more as needed
 - 1/4 cup granulated sugar
 - Pinch of table salt
 - 2 tablespoons plum or peach preserves

Prepare filling: In a medium bowl, whisk 1/3

cup of the sugar and the cornstarch, kosher salt and lemon zest. Add sliced plums and gently toss with your hands to evenly coat with sugar. Cover the bowl and put in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours or overnight.

Make the tart shell: Lightly butter the bottom and sides of a 9-1/2-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom.

Put butter cubes in the freezer and whisk egg yolk, lemon zest and vanilla in a small bowl.

Place flour, sugar and table salt in the bowl of a food processor and pulse a few times to combine. Add butter and pulse until the mixture is crumbly and mealy, about 25 short pulses.

Add the egg yolk mixture and blend, using long pulses, just until it forms a moist, crumbly mass, about 15 3-second pulses. The dough won’t come together on its own, but it should hold together when squeezed.

Transfer dough to the tart pan. Dip the bottom of a flat-bottomed cup measure in flour and use it to press the dough onto the bottom and sides of the pan in an even layer. Start with the sides, which should be 1/4 inch thick. Reflour the cup whenever it starts to stick to the dough. Wrap the pan in plastic and refrigerate it for at least 1 hour and up to 1 day.

Blind bake the shell: Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 375 degrees. Unwrap the tart shell and prick the bottom and sides several times with a fork. Spray one side of a piece of parchment or foil with cooking spray.

Line the shell with the sprayed side down and fill the lined shell with pie weights or dry beans. Set the tart pan on a baking sheet and bake for 20 minutes. Carefully remove the liner and pie weights. Should any dough stick to the liner, peel it off and

patch it back into the shell.

Reduce heat to 350 degrees and continue baking until the sides and bottom of the shell are golden brown and dry, 10-15 minutes more. Cool on a rack for about 20 minutes.

Finish the tart: Drain plums in a sieve or colander set over a medium bowl for a few minutes.

Pour juice into a small saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until very thick, about 3 minutes. Scrape into a small bowl and let cool for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, melt preserves in the saucepan over medium-low heat or microwave in a small bowl until syrupy. Pour preserves into tart shell and evenly brush them over the bottom and sides. With a rubber spatula, spread the plum juice over the preserves on the bottom of the shell.

Starting at the edge of the shell, arrange plum slices cut side down and tightly overlapping in concentric circles. If you have more slices, keep tucking them in wherever they fit. You can also pile a few in the center.

Sprinkle the remaining 1/2 tablespoon sugar over the plums.

Bake the tart directly on the oven rack until the plums are tender when poked with a paring knife and caramelized along their edges (a few tips may even blacken). The crust should be a deep golden brown, and any juices should be syrupy and bubbly, 40-50 minutes. After you remove the tart from the oven, moisten the plums by dipping a pastry brush into the juices and brushing any surfaces that look dry.

Cool the tart in its pan on a rack for at least 2 hours before unmolding and slicing with a very sharp knife.

— Adapted from fine-cooking.com

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Assemble the absolute best BLT

By **KATE KRADER**
Bloomberg News

We are in that delirious moment of summer when you can’t make a wrong move at the farmers market. Tomatoes in all sizes lie next to piles of corn and fields of berries in cartons. It’s a grown-up version of the cliché about the kid in a candy store.

Which makes it the consummate time to eat a BLT. One of the most classic sandwiches is more than the sum of its parts, even if those parts get contentious. As the food blog Grub Street pointed out in 2019, some fanatics say it’s all about the tomatoes, while others maintain bacon is the VIP. Still others believe mayo is the unsung hero. (The lettuce, it seems, is forever the bridesmaid and never the bride, to quote one more cliché.)

The BLT at Daily Provisions, named “The Absolute Best in New York” in that 2019 story, comes down on the side of the tomatoes. Its LT puts the ripe fruit front and center, with bacon as an add-on, making the BLT technically an “off the menu” item. The versions are tied in popularity: Each represents 40% of the sandwich’s sales, according to managing director Jessamyn Waldman Rodriguez, with the other 20% of orders coming in for an LAT, which boasts avocado.

Now, the Danny Meyer-led café is expanding in the city with a spot in the West Village that is in “neighborhood preview” mode before officially opening in September, as well as an upcoming branch in the Manhattan West complex near Hudson Yards. So there will be more opportunity to grab its expert version — or better yet, make it at home.

The trick here is to lavish attention on each component.

Start with the lettuce: Daily Provisions

eschews leaves of iceberg or romaine in favor of crisp, peppery watercress. Then the tomato is tossed with a light lemon dressing before being layered into the sandwich. At the café, they peel it, too: “It’s a nice luxury to not have the skin on it,” says Rodriguez. “It elevates the sandwich and releases a little more of the tomato juices.” Also key is to use a single slice that’s very thick, about an inch, as if you were making the perfect tomato sandwich.

If you’re a lazy BLT maker, like me, you can omit the peeling step and still have a perfectly excellent tomato. The bread is ciabatta, which is warmed up before serving, so the crust is a bit crisp and the interior warm and puffy — an idyllic environment for a BLT. The bacon is cut thick, so you get a great chewy, meaty bite.

But the key to this extraordinary sandwich and what makes it shout “summer!” so loud and clear is the basil mayonnaise that’s spread on both halves of the bread. “The basil mayo was an element that helped us maximize seasonality, and the lemon zest in the mayo also really brightens up the entire sandwich,” says Amanda Wilson, culinary director at Daily Provisions. It tastes like a sunny day and brings everything together like a great party planner, with an additional zippy kick from the watercress.

The sandwich is a monumental, two-handed number, so it may be hard to get every single component into one bite. Keep trying until you do.

The following recipe is adapted from the work of Amanda Wilson and Donovan Tian, chef de cuisine, Daily Provisions.

THE ABSOLUTE BEST BLT

Makes 4

- 8 thick slices of bacon (about 1/2 pound)
- Loaf of ciabatta bread, or 4 ciabatta rolls, halved and closed back together
- 2 ripe, medium tomatoes, peeled (optional, see Note), and cut into four 1-inch thick slices
- 4 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- Flaky salt and freshly ground pepper
- About 3/4 cup basil mayonnaise (recipe follows)
- 2 cups watercress

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Arrange the bacon strips on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until well browned but not too crisp, about 15 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain. Put the bread in the oven and bake just until the outside is crispy and the inside warm, about 2 minutes.

In a shallow bowl, combine the oil and lemon juice with a large pinch each of salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and turn to coat. Spread a heaping tablespoon of basil mayonnaise on each bread half. Add the tomato, bacon, and watercress, close the sandwich and serve.

Note: To peel the tomatoes, core them and make a small ‘X’ on the bottom. Put them in a medium saucepan of boiling water for about 30 seconds, just until the skin starts to come off. Immediately transfer to a bowl of ice water to cool. Dry the tomatoes and peel off the skins before cutting in half.

BASIL MAYONNAISE

Makes 1 cup

- 1 1/2 cups lightly packed basil leaves
- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- Zest from 1/4 of a lemon

In a small saucepan of boiling water, blanch the basil leaves, just until wilted, about 30 seconds. Transfer to an ice water bath to cool. Squeeze out all the water and transfer to a mini processor. Add the olive oil and salt and puree. Stir 2 tablespoons of the puree into the mayonnaise with the lemon zest.



The makings of a BLT sandwich.

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