

For the love of lemons

By DANIEL NEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Lemons get a bad rap.

When we buy a car that doesn't run, we call it a lemon. When life gives you lemons, we say you should make lemonade, as if lemons were something merely to be endured.

It's not fair. Lemons are bright and sunny, brisk and invigorating. They add a delicious splash of life to food, they sprinkle it with the essence of spring.

I say, when life gives you lemons, you should celebrate. Yay, lemons!

It's time we elevate the humble lemon to the pantheon of culinary flavors. And so I decided to cook four dishes that take full advantage of this most versatile of citrus fruits.

I made dishes that are sweet and savory, main courses and a dessert. How many other ingredients are equally at home inside a pie as well as saddling up to a piece of grilled meat?

I started with shrimp. Lemon is a natural accompaniment to all crustaceans; I don't think I've ever cooked lobster, crab or shrimp without using at least a healthy squeeze or two of lemon.

In order to highlight and focus on the taste of the lemon, I decided to make the shrimp the easiest way I know how: I boiled it.

Usually, when I boil shrimp I use beer or a mixture of beer and water and a bountiful amount of Old Bay seasoning. But this time, I decided to mix lemon juice with water.

In my first attempt, I used Old Bay, too. It tasted great, but it tasted like Old Bay with just a hint of lemon.

So I tried the water and lemon juice alone. It was still good, but not lemony enough. So I tried water and more lemon juice. It was better, but still not lemony enough.

So I tried a proportion of nearly equal amounts of lemon juice and water, and the result was everything I could hope for — bright and lemony, without overpowering the shrimp.

You can serve the shrimp hot or cold. I decided to forego the traditional cocktail sauce, because I wanted to savor the flavor of lemon. But if you think shrimp are indecently naked without cocktail sauce, by all means go ahead and serve it.

I next decided to take advantage of a classic combination of flavors that is often overlooked: lamb with lemon. The tang of the lemon plays a soaring counterpoint to what many people (not me) think of as the gaminess of lamb.

I used tender and flavorful lamb chops, and created a marinade of things that go particularly well with lamb — olive oil, garlic, shallots, Dijon mustard, thyme (or rosemary) and lemon juice, plus salt and pepper. I covered the meat with the marinade for one hour before cooking it.

Usually, I grill my lamb, but not everyone has a grill. So I decided to cook mine on the stove. You don't get any of the flavor of the fire that way, which is especially desirable with lamb, but you do get more caramelization across the surface of the meat as a trade-off.

It was quicker and easier than using the grill, and the results were marvelous. The lemon was a high note singing clearly and steadily over the earthbound meatiness of the lamb.

When I thought about how to make a lemon chicken, I had a brilliant idea: Why not use the exact same marinade that I had used for the lamb? After all, olive oil, garlic, shallots, Dijon mustard, thyme



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Lemon lamb chops.

(or rosemary), lemon juice and salt and pepper all go particularly well with chicken, too.

Usually I grill my chicken, but not everyone has a grill. So I decided to cook mine in the oven. You don't get any of the flavor of the fire that way, which is especially desirable with chicken, but it is easier to cook, and less fussy.

The chicken tasted great, it was a wonderful roast chicken. But to be honest, it wasn't lemony enough to be lemon chicken. So I doubled the amount of lemon juice in the marinade and tried again.

The result was subtle, but remarkably pleasant. Not too lemony at all. For dessert, I had thought to make lemon meringue pie, but I decided that was too commonplace. So I made a lemon Shaker tart.

Reputedly based on a recipe from the Shakers, this tart uses every part of the lemon, skin and all. Well, not the seeds. But it uses the whole lemon, minus the seeds.

I made cookbook author Alison Roman's recipe, which uses a simple shortbread crust. It's ridiculously

delicious, a buttery, crisp base for the lemon custard to go on top.

The custard is also easy, but it requires some waiting time. You slice a lemon very thin, removing any seeds, and let the slices sit in a mixture of lemon juice and sugar for at least one hour and up to a full day. Then you mix in a lot of egg yolks and whole eggs, along with a bit of flour and a dash of salt, and bake it until you can't stand how good your house smells.

The tart is an absolute delight, and it is not too sweet as many lemon desserts can be.

Maybe that's why it's called a tart.

LEMON-BOILED SHRIMP

Yield: 4 servings

1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons lemon juice
3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons water
1 pound shrimp, with or without shells

For optional cocktail sauce

3/4 cup chili sauce
1/3 cup ketchup

1 or 2 tablespoons prepared horseradish
1 1/2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
Juice from 1 or 2 wedges of lemon

1. In a large pot, bring lemon juice and water to a boil. Add shrimp and boil until shrimp are pink and curled; the time will vary depending on the size of the shrimp. Serve hot or cold.

2. If making a cocktail sauce, combine chili sauce, ketchup, horseradish, Worcestershire sauce and lemon juice in a bowl. Serve with shrimp.

Per serving: 183 calories; 1 g fat; 1 g saturated fat; 183 mg cholesterol; 24 g protein; 21 g carbohydrate; 14 g sugar; 2 g fiber; 1,072 mg sodium; 91 mg calcium

— Recipe by Daniel Neman

LEMON LAMB CHOPS

Yield: 3 to 4 servings

2 pounds lamb chops
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 garlic clove
1 tablespoon roughly chopped shallots
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme or rosemary leaves
1/4 cup olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons oil (not olive

oil), if cooking on stove

1. Place lamb chops in a flat dish. Put lemon juice, garlic, shallots, mustard, thyme or rosemary, olive oil and salt and pepper in a blender and blend until smooth. Pour marinade over both sides of lamb and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour, turning once or twice.

2. Set up grill for direct heat or place a large, heavy skillet over high heat and add 2 tablespoons oil. Cook meat, turning once or twice, until desired doneness (about 5 minutes total for medium rare for 3/4-inch chops).

Per serving (based on 4): 413 calories; 25 g fat; 5 g saturated fat; 150 mg cholesterol; 48 g protein; 2 g carbohydrate; 5 g sugar; 2 g fiber; 217 mg sodium; 28 mg calcium

— Recipe by Daniel Neman

LEMON CHICKEN

Yield: 3 to 4 servings

1 (3 1/2 to 4-pound) chicken
1/2 cup lemon juice
1 garlic clove
1 tablespoon roughly chopped shallot
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme

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Remembering the spectacular Sacajawea Hotel



GINNY MAMMEN
OUT AND ABOUT

In the early days of La Grande more than 30 shops and businesses were located in Old Town along C Street between First and Third. After the railroad arrived in 1884 the current Adams Avenue began to draw some of those as well as cultivate new ones. Buildings began to appear starting at the Fourth Street end of Adams and moving eastward year by year. These early constructions were originally wood frame and included private residences as well as ones for a variety of businesses.

Looking into the 1400 block on the south side of Adams on the 1889 Sanborn map, we find a very sparsely inhabited area. There were at that time only three buildings, most likely wood frame construction, located in the west third of the block, lots 1-5. Because these structures were not constructed for long-term investments by their builders, up until 1915 various buildings and a variety of businesses came and went in this section of the block.

There was a fairly large home located on lots 1 and 2 (1402-1404) Adams in 1889. Between 1889 and 1903 that house was removed and Baker and Smith



Fred Hill Collection

The Sacajawea Hotel opened in 1928 at the corner of Fir and Adams in downtown La Grande. The building was razed in 1971.

had a Flour & Feed store at that location on the corner of Adams and Fir.

By 1903 Baker and Smith had gone out of business and a building housing La Grande Pawnbrokers, run by Sarah Jacobs, had been constructed on the corner at 1402. Sarah's husband, Peter, was a baker by trade

and between the fall of 1904 and 1910 the Jacobses moved to California where Peter established his own bakery.

By 1903 the lot next door at 1404 Adams had a fairly large building housing a store on the first floor with the second floor designated as a "Hall." There was a general merchandise store oper-

ated by M. & R. G. Cotrell located on the south side of Adams near Fir during that time, and this was probably the store.

The second house in this section of the block, located on lot 4 at 1408 Adams, was identified in both the 1889 and 1903 Sanborn maps as also having a business located in the dwelling with

a fairly large stable located at the rear of the lot. The Sanborn maps identified it as a painting business, but the City Directory, during this time period, had George Ball and his carpenter business here. It is possible that George was both the carpenter and the painter. By 1912 Pierce & Johnson had their carpentry and repair shop in this location. In 1915 Johnson left the business and Pierce remained in business there for a while. Sometime during this 1912-1915 era a Mr. Moon had his bakery located at 1408 1/2 Adams where he advertised the "Best Bread in Town."

Lot 5 at 1410 Adams had a "hay flour and feed store" located here in 1903. Bradner's Cream Station was in this location in 1918.

As said earlier, this part of Adams was not very stable. Both buildings and businesses came and went. But between 1925 and 1927 there were big plans being made for this corner. Julius Roesch was involved with acquiring the property to build a hotel that would rival a competitor who was planning to construct a hotel at the corner of Adams and Fourth — the La Grande Hotel.

The Sacajawea Hotel, first called the Sacajawea Inn, was under construction in 1927 and opened on Feb. 18, 1928.

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