

In praise of winter citrus

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

It may seem counterintuitive, but winter is the pinnacle of citrus season.

Around Christmas, satsumas, blood oranges, kumquats and Meyer lemons start to appear at grocery stores. They are accompanied by rarer varieties including Makrut limes, Cara Cara oranges and the “I have no clue, but it is pretty” tentacled Buddha’s hands.

I regularly praise the hearty and sustaining brown food of winter. I’m known in some circles as brown food’s biggest fan. But even I eagerly anticipate winter citrus piercing the home cooking horizon.

Citrus season is nature’s way of sending out a rescue team to remind us that spring is coming and that bright, zingy and enlivening flavors are arriving. I actually experienced happy tears once at Tartine Bakery in San Francisco when I took a bracingly sharp bite of a lemon bar on a gloomy and chilly winter day. The healing power of food is real.

My favorite winter citrus is a Meyer lemon. While named for Frank Meyer, a 20th century agricultural explorer, Meyer lem-

ons originated in China. They are believed to be a cross between a regular lemon and a mandarin orange. The fruit is about the size of a lemon with a smooth, deep yellow peel. Meyer lemons have a sweet and floral taste. They’re lower in acid and lack the bitterness of a regular lemon. If people were lemons, unfortunately I would not be a Meyer.

Let winter citrus be the bright sun that’s missing from our overcast wintery sky.

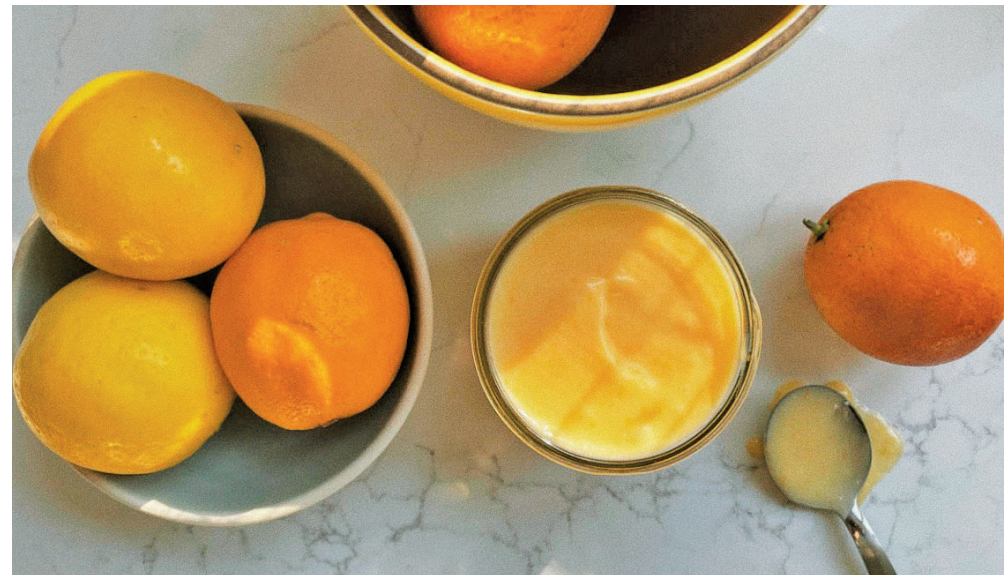
Meyer Lemon Curd

Yields 1.5 cups

Slightly adapted from Alice Medrich

While I use Meyer lemons, you can use regular lemons, or even blood oranges for this recipe. Spoon the chilled curd on ice cream, on buttery toast, layered in a yogurt parfait, or eat it by the spoonful, I won’t judge.

- Three large eggs
- Zest of 1 medium Meyer lemon
- 1/2 cup strained fresh Meyer lemon juice
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into chunks
- Pinch of kosher salt
- Set a strainer over a medium heat-proof bowl.



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Winter citrus helps remind us spring is not far away.

Whisk the eggs in a nonreactive saucepan to blend. Whisk in the Meyer lemon zest, juice and sugar. Add the butter. Whisk over medium heat, reaching into the corners and scraping the sides and bottom of the pan, until the butter melts and the mixture starts to thicken, about 2 to 3 minutes. When the mixture begins to simmer around the edges, continue to whisk for about 10 seconds longer. Do not let the mixture boil (it will scramble the eggs.)

Remove from the heat and scrape the mix-

ture into the strainer, pressing gently on the solids. Scrape any lemon curd clinging to the underside of the strainer into the bowl. Mix in a pinch of kosher salt to finish.

Refrigerate until chilled before using. Lemon curd keeps in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to one week.

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