





Zesty lemon (packs a punch!)

Last month, we introduced our new heritage food contributor, the inimitable Karen Dudley of Woodstock's The Kitchen. To celebrate Valentine's Day, she's baking a sesame yoghurt cardamom cake with a sweet lemony syrup.



Karen Dudlev

uring the Clinton administration, along with other young women from all over the world, I worked in an historical mansion on the banks of the Potomac River in Washington, just a hop and a skip from the political hurly burly of Capitol Hill.

There I learnt 'servant leadership' mangling sheets in the basement, polishing marble floors, turning rooms and serving meals to visiting dignitaries and heads of state who had come to retreat, find refuge or broker peace in the Library or the Breakfast Room.

In the hush of the vast historical mansion. laying out a little plate of treats for a visiting former KGB officer, I had my first encounter with a lemon square. It was only the crust, but I had never before eaten such lemon perfection: butter, flour, sugar and slightly caramelised lemon: I closed my eyes and savoured the dense, gooey bite: cool, sticky, sweet and quintessentially lemon!

I decided there and then that I would no longer waste my time with arbitrary, sitting-on-the-fence flavour. If it's going to be lemony, it must be very lemony – lemony and sweet!

There are a few who might happily eat a lemon just so, a lemon wedge squished to the teeth in an eye-rolling burst of sour. Have you ever witnessed the puckered up face of a child's first encounter with a slice

But for most of us, lemon is a team player. When it is not brazenly showing off with its soul mate, sugar (lemon pudding,

sorbet, curd, meringue pie), it's often the jester, somersaulting and cavorting through plainer flavours, bringing brightness and playfulness to a palette, teasing out more demure flavours – a squeeze of bright lemon on fresh fish. Sometimes, it is the soprano carrying the tune for deeper chorus (cumin, avgolemono, risotto, pasta and lamb).

One of my favourite lemon friendships is the trio of parsley, lemon and garlic. My mother, Ruth, would make a wondrous osso bucco. She would have me finely chop this threesome: lemon (clean), garlic (bright) and parsley (fresh) into a gremolata topping. What a revelation and testament to the redemptive power of lemon! A formative flavour experience with the fresh lemon and parsley coaxing out all the marvellous flavours of the meat!

Lemon's nemesis is when it has no partner, however delicate, to balance it - no sweet oyster or asparagus, no salt or sugar to counter its tartness.

We know, of course, that in addition to a string of domestic uses, lemon prevents avocados, apples and artichokes from colouring.

And the propitious use of lemon zest is certainly one of my favourite devices: essential in crumbs and crumbles, brightening vegetables, soups and dressings, emboldening pulses, and calling out the flavours of the food that we love.

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This cake is one of my all-time favorites - the warm syrup is poured over the cooled cake. Delicious!



Sesame yoghurt cardamom cake

- 220g butter
- 125ml sugar
- 120ml honey
- · zest of 2 lemons
- · 4 eggs, separated
- 220g flour
- . 5ml baking powder
- 5ml bicarbonate of soda
- · pinch of salt
- 220g Greek yoghurt
- 160ml sultanas
- 15ml cardamom seeds (from approximately 25 cardamom pods)
- 45ml sesame seeds

SYRUP

- juice of 2 lemons
- 6 tablespoons honey
- zest of 1 lemon
- a few paper-thin slices of lemon
- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C. Beat together the butter, sugar, honey and lemon zest until creamy. Beat in the egg yolks, one at a time. 2 Sift the flour, baking powder, baking soda and pinch of salt into a separate bowl. Then fold in the batter, alternating with the yoghurt. Fold in the sultanas and cardamom seeds. Beat the egg whites until stiff and fold carefully into the mixture.
- 3 Pour into a greased 22cm tin lined with baking paper. Sprinkle generously with sesame seeds.
- 4 Bake at 180°C for 65 minutes. (If you find the cake is browning too much, cover loosely with a sheet of baking paper with a little hole cut in it.) Remove from the oven and leave to rest for at least 10 minutes.
- **5** To make the syrup, boil the ingredients together for 5 minutes, stirring to combine. Pour the cooled syrup carefully over the hot cake or pour the warm syrup over the cake once completely cooled. Serve with yoghurt or mascarpone cream and fresh figs. 🏗