

Lemons

“Lemon tree, very pretty, and the lemon flower is sweet, but the fruit of the lemon is impossible to eat” (as sung by Peter, Paul & Mary)

It might be said that when the German duo Freudenthaler and Hinkel penned the melancholy lyrics for this popular hit song, they were in fact barking up the wrong tree; and perhaps in more ways than one.

In ancient times the lemon (Latin name *Citrus Limon*) was regarded as a symbol of love and fertility - in stark contrast to the German pair's sad fruit of deception. Furthermore, whilst a lemon may not be what you reach for when you want a snack, eat it you can, every bit of it and in lots of different ways! The tangy, tart flavour of the juice and the sensuous, aromatic oils in the zest make lemons indispensable for bringing out the flavour of all kinds of foods. Even the pith and seeds have their uses. These contain lots of pectin which is essential for setting home-made jams and marmalades.

Lemons are good for you too. They don't just cure scurvy; the little yellow fruit is a powerhouse of phyto-nutrients, bioflavonoids, Vitamin C and other anti-oxidants shown to prevent and cure many common illnesses.

For the freshest, most fragrant fruit, grow your own lemons where ever you are. Dwarf varieties will grow happily in large pots for many years. Your local nursery will have varieties that grow well in your area. Put them in a prominent spot in the garden during the warmer months as they make lovely pot plants. Move to a sheltered spot or greenhouse in winter where they will be protected from frost. Apply some citrus food or organic fertiliser during spring and summer and you will be rewarded with lots of beautiful, fresh, chemical free fruit.

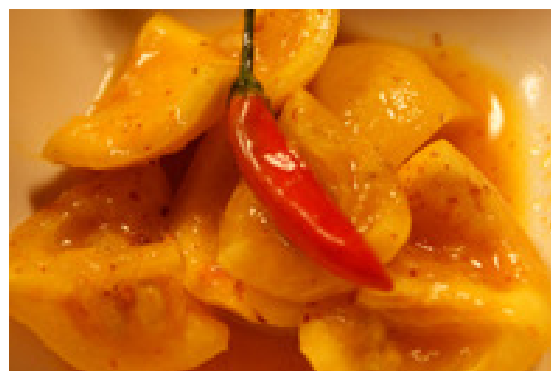
Lemons are gloriously versatile. The juice is superb for preventing discolouration of foods such as avocados and artichokes; it is a wonderful tenderiser for meat and chicken; it adds flavour and balance to dressings, sauces and sweets; it makes delicious drinks (think lemonade and limoncello) and of course, lemon juice is a must for drizzling over seafood. The zest can be candied and preserved in sugar syrups or used to add pizzazz to icings, cakes and fish dishes, while the entire lemon is preserved or pickled for Middle Eastern preserved lemons and the pungent, flavour packed Indian *achaars*.

I can recall my mother making huge jars of lemon *achaar* every summer. Chunks of the juicy, sunshine yellow fruit with bright red

chillies peering out from between them sat 'cooking' in the hot sun for several weeks whilst we children waited with mouths watering to savour it with hot buttery parathas and spicy dhals.

The version given here uses modern technology (the microwave) driven by a bit of A-type flair.

Super Speedy Lemon Pickle



This is the quick version in case you don't have the sunshine or the patience. Use any sour lemons you like but make sure they are not waxed. Most commercial lemons are, so you may need to find some organic ones. Or try the thin skinned Indian limes available from Indian grocers.

6 lemons or Indian limes
8 or 10 red chillies
6 cloves garlic
2 tablespoons salt
1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp chilli powder or to taste

Wash and dry the lemons and chillies. Quarter the lemons and place in a large microwave proof bowl. Cover and microwave on high for 4 minutes, stirring the fruit half way through.

Add the chillies and garlic, and microwave for a further 2 minutes. Stir in the remaining ingredients. Allow to stand for 5 minutes and transfer to a clean non-corrosive container with a tight fitting lid.

If you can wait, let the flavour develop for a few days before eating.

Article by Kris Dhillon author of "The Curry Secret"