



Sarah's easy-to-make Luscious Lemon Bars are the perfect summertime treat with a rich and buttery shortbread crust topped with a thick layer of perfectly tart lemon filling. Sarah Nasello / The Forum

Sarah's Luscious Lemon Bars

Makes: 24 2-inch bars

Shortbread ingredients:

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted
½ cup granulated sugar
1 ½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon kosher salt (skip if using salted butter)
2 cups + 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

Filling ingredients:

2 cups granulated sugar
6 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon kosher salt
6 large eggs
1 cup lemon juice, freshly squeezed (about 4 lemons)
2 tablespoons lemon zest
Powdered sugar (for dusting)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Line a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with parchment paper or aluminum foil and leave some hanging over the sides so that the bars will be easy to remove when ready.

In a medium-large bowl, add the melted butter, sugar, vanilla and salt. Use a wooden spoon to stir together until fully combined. Tip the dough into the prepared baking dish and use the back of a spoon to firmly press the dough into the pan in a smooth, even layer. Use a paper towel to wipe any crumbs from the bowl and set aside to use for the lemon filling.

Bake the shortbread until the edges just begin to turn a light golden brown, about 22 to 25 minutes.

Prepare the lemon curd filling as the shortbread bakes. Sift the flour and sugar together in the same bowl that was used for the shortbread. Add the eggs and use a whisk to vigorously mix them in until fully blended. Add the lemon juice and zest and whisk to combine.

Once the shortbread is ready, remove the pan from the oven and immediately use a fork to poke holes all around the crust, but not going all the way through to the bottom. This will bind the lemon curd filling to the crust.

Pour the prepared lemon filling over the warm crust. Bake the bars until the filling is set and barely jiggles when tapping the side of the pan, about 20 to 25 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and transfer to a wire rack. Cool completely at room temperature, at least 1 hour.

Once cool, cover the pan with plastic wrap and refrigerate the bars until well-chilled, about 2 hours or even overnight.

When ready to slice, run a knife or offset spatula between the pan and the bars at each end of the pan and then use the parchment or foil overhang to lift the bars out of the baking pan and onto a cutting board.

Dust the top generously with powdered sugar and cut the bars into 2-inch squares. To create sharp squares, use a damp paper towel to wipe the knife after each cut.

To store: Lemon bars can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week, or in the freezer for several months. For best result, cut the bars into squares and freeze on a baking sheet until frozen, about 2 hours, then transfer to an airtight container.

Sarah's tip: Other citrus fruits like orange, lime and grapefruit can also be used in place of, or combined with, the lemon.

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"Home with the Lost Italian" is a weekly column written by Sarah Nasello featuring recipes by her husband, Tony Nasello. The couple owned Sarello's in Moorhead and lives in Fargo with their son, Giovanni. Readers can reach them at sarahnasello@gmail.com.