



Citrus season is in full swing. Preserving is all about taking advantage of our seasonal bounty so we can enjoy it after the season has passed. You probably have enough marmalade by now to last you through the year so let's take a different road. There is a little turn off on the citrus road that you either missed completely or just have not taken the time to explore. That little detour has an intriguing scent of lemons and the mystique of North Africa.

Do I have your attention now?

Let's talk about Preserved Lemons. If you are a cookbook junkie, you may have perused recipes from Middle Eastern or North African cuisines such as Moroccan, Lebanese or Israeli. Day dreaming of making a salmon tangine, a vegetable couscous, or braised lamb dishes. The ingredients for these dishes are not so exotic until we get down to that secret ingredient, Preserved Lemons.

Preserved in salt and lemon juice and flavored with bay leaf, cinnamon and black peppercorns, these tasty lemons, which are a staple in Middle Eastern cuisine, are a welcome addition to many dishes. The flavor of Preserved Lemon is mellow yet intensely lemony. The peel, the part you use, is soft and satiny and a little salty. To use them you peel away the pulp and rinse off the salt.

Traditional Preserved Lemons

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving

Yield: 1 quart jar

10 lemons, divided

1/2 cup **pickling salt or canning salt

4 bay leaves
4 cinnamon sticks (each about 4:)
1 tsp whole black peppercorns (optional)

Prepare jars and lids. For this recipe the jar needs to be sterilized prior to packing. Boil jar in water for 10 minutes and keep hot and ready to use.

Wash 5 lemons in warm water, scrubbing well to remove any dirt or wax. Dry well, using paper towels. Cut a then (~1/2") slice off each end. Set the lemon on end and cut it into quarters, without cutting through the bottom end and leaving it intact. Juice the remaining 5 lemons to measure 1 1/2 cups of juice.



Sprinkle 1 Tbsp. pickling salt over the bottom of the sterilized jar. Working over a bowl, pack 1 heaping Tbsp. salt into each lemon before placing in the jar, end up. When 3 lemons have been salted and packed, slip bay leaves and cinnamon sticks against the sides of the jar and add peppercorns, if using. Repeat with remaining lemons and salt. Cover with the remaining salt.

Fill jar with lemon juice to within 1/2" of top of jar. Center lid on jar. Screw down until resistance is met, then increase to fingertip-tight.

Place jar in a dark, cool cupboard for 2 weeks, shaking every day to distribute the salt. Consider placing your jar in a paper bag to insure it is kept in the dark during marinating time. After 2 weeks, the lemons are ready to use. Remove pulp and membrane, using only the peel. Rinse under water to remove excess salt, and dry with paper towels. Store preserved lemons in a container with an airtight lid. Refrigerate up to 6 months.

Variation: If you prefer, cut lemons into quarters. In a large bowl, combine lemon quarters with salt and toss to mix. Fill jar halfway, add the bay leaves, cinnamon sticks and peppercorns, if using, then continue until jar is filled, pushing the lemons well down to squeeze in as many as possible.

** be sure to use pickling or canning salt. Although regular table salt is safe to use, it contains anti-caking ingredients that will cause your brine to be cloudy and unattractive.

Spices are optional. Many Preserved Lemon recipes call for no spices at all.

When purchasing lemons, select top quality fruit that is heavy for its size and shows no blemishes. Organic produce may be a good choice, as it is less likely to be waxed or coated.