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When winter is at its coldest, dreariest and darkest, I wander the produce section and bask in the summery promise of citrus. From November to late spring, citrus arrives from warmer climates, bringing us a delicious dilemma. Will it be tiny clementines or giant pomelos? Sweet Meyer lemons or bitter Sevilles?

No matter which variety catches your fancy, look for fruit that is heavy for its size, firm and blemish-free. Although colour doesn't necessarily indicate quality or freshness, make sure the skin has no bruises, mould or soft spots.

Once home, citrus will keep on the counter for a few days, but you can extend the shelf life to a few weeks if you store your purchases in the refrigerator in a perforated produce bag. Sealing them in no-breathe plastic encourages mould.

AVOID CITRUS WASTE

To make the most of a citrus bounty, enlist your freezer. Zest first. Juice second.

After you wash and towel off the fruit, use a microplane or the small holes of a box grater to remove the colourful outer layer of skin. Stop grating before you reach the bitter white pith. Place any unused zest in a small, lidded container and pop it into the freezer. Grated zest keeps frozen for up to a year.

Once the zest is removed, the fruit will dry out, so before the freshly grated fruit has a chance to rebel, cut it in half around its waist and juice it using a citrus juicer or reamer. Strain out the seeds and pour juice into an ice cube tray. Once frozen, transfer the juice cubes to a resealable plastic bag and store in the freezer for quick retrieval. Frozen juice will keep for six months.

For both zest and juice cubes, be sure to label your stash or risk attracting UFOs (Unidentified Frozen Objects).

Bottled lemon and lime juice are convenient, so why bother with fresh? Not only are you reducing waste, you're also avoiding disappointment.

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Bottled lemon and lime juice can impart an off-putting metallic taste to dishes if a recipe calls for more than a splash. It's worth the extra three minutes to juice your citrus, and this means you never have to run to the store for just one little lemon or lime.

CITRUS GLOSSARY

Lemons: The generic lemons you buy year round are likely Eureka's. Thick skinned and oval, this familiar fruit delivers loads of tart, acidic flavour. Their tartness balances sweet desserts, especially light cakes and custards. On the savoury side, lemon adds life and lift to chicken, fish, seafood, lamb and vegetables.

Meyer lemons: Available November to late spring, these will be clearly labelled. Whether this hybrid is a result of crossing a lemon with an orange or a mandarin is up for debate, but no one argues about their unique sweetness. Meyers have a round shape and smooth, thin skin that ranges from deep yellow to almost orange. Because they are less acidic than their counterparts, they are often used in drinks, sorbets and preserved lemons.



Limes: Persian limes are available year round. This seedless citrus fruit delivers lots of tart juice and a distinctive, instantly recognizable flavour. Its smooth, thin skin will vary in colour from deep green to light yellow-green. Like lemons, they pair well with delicate, cream-based desserts. On the savoury side, they are often featured with Mexican, Thai and Indian cuisine.

Key limes: About the size of a walnut, the diminutive Key lime is more acidic than its larger cousin. Its sharp flavour is intense, making it perfect for pies and cocktails. Be warned, these tiny limes have tiny seeds.

Sweet oranges: With thin skins and juicy pulp, Valencia's make good juicing oranges. On the other hand, firm-fleshed navel oranges are ideal for eating. Cara Caras are navels with reddish pulp, while blood oranges are named for their dark red flesh. With brightly coloured pulp and an orange-berry flavour, these last two varieties make striking additions to salads. All oranges pair well with beef, fish, vegetables and seafood.

Seville oranges: These extremely bitter oranges aren't for eating, although their high acidity makes them perfect for marmalade. Their intense flavour is also featured in liqueurs like Grand Marnier.

Mandarins: Available November through June, mandarins cover a range of familiar fruits, including clementines and tangerines. Tangelos, a cross between a tangerine and a pomelo, is yet another option. Although mandarins can be used in baking, preserves or salads, their easy-to-peel skins and sweet flesh make them the quintessential healthy snack.

Grapefruit: Named for the way it hangs in clusters from the tree, not its flavour, grapefruit can be mouth-puckering bitter or borderline sweet. Colours range from pale yellow (white), through pink to deep ruby red. Think beyond breakfast and fruit salad. Grapefruit also makes a welcomed addition to fish and seafood dishes.

BLUEBERRY-LIME CORNMEAL MUFFINS

Talk about messy: These are not pack-in-your-lunch muffins. They're more have-a-cup-of-tea-and-a-nice-chat muffins.

Although the cornmeal base is studded with blueberries, lime is the anchor. It balances the sweetness of the cornmeal, brightens the freshness of the blueberries and smooths the edges of the honey.

With its own glaze and butter, lime works its way into every layer of this delicious muffin.

- 2 cups** (500 ml) all-purpose flour
- 1 cup** (250 ml) fine ground cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons** (10 ml) baking powder
- 1 teaspoon** (5 ml) baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon** (2 ml) fine sea salt
- 3/4 cup** (185 ml) granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup** (60 ml) brown sugar
- 1 large** egg, room temperature
- 1 cup** (250 ml) buttermilk
- 3/4 cup** (185 ml) melted butter
- 1 teaspoon** (5 ml) pure vanilla extract
- Zest of 1** lime, finely grated
- 1 1/2 cups** (375 ml) fresh or frozen unthawed blueberries (wild, if you can get them)

Lime Glaze

- 1/2 cup** (125 ml) granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup** (60 ml) fresh lime juice
- Zest of 1** lime, finely grated

Whipped Honey-Lime Butter (Optional)

- 1/2 cup** (125 ml) butter, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon** (15 ml) honey
- Zest of 1** lime, finely grated
- 1 tablespoon** (15 ml) lime juice
- Generous pinch** of fine sea salt

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line 18 muffin cups with paper or parchment liners.
2. In a large bowl, sift together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, baking soda



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and salt.

3. In a medium bowl, mix together the granulated sugar, brown sugar, egg, buttermilk, butter, vanilla, and lime zest.

4. Add blueberries to the flour mixture and toss to coat. Pour the buttermilk mixture over the flour mixture and using a spatula, mix until the batter is just combined. Don't over-mix.

5. Using a one-quarter-cup scoop, fill muffin cups. Bake 17 to 20 minutes or until the muffins are golden and a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

6. While muffins are baking, mix the glaze and make the whipped butter (if using).

Glaze: In a small bowl, mix sugar, lime juice and zest until sugar is dissolved. Set aside. Stir well just before using.

Whipped butter: In a small bowl, using electric beaters on low, blend the butter,

honey, lime zest and lime juice together.

With the electric mixer on high speed, whip for three minutes, or until light and fluffy. Add salt to taste.

Finishing

Allow the muffins to cool for a few minutes in the pan before transferring to a rack. While still warm, dip the tops of the muffins into the glaze. Turn upright, poke a few holes in the top of the muffins with a toothpick, then spoon the remaining glaze evenly over the muffins. Allow to cool.

Eat sliced with regular butter, or whipped honey-lime butter.

Makes 18 muffins

This recipe is excerpted from The Messy Baker: More than 75 Delicious Recipes from a Real Kitchen by Charmian Christie ©2014.

VERMICELLI WITH LEMONY SALMON & KALE

Loads of lemon, a kiss of garlic and tender salmon turn winter kale into a light, bright dish that will remind you of summer. You can customize your lemon level with a wedge – or two – of lemon on the side.

- 1 bunch** kale*, stems removed and cut into thin slices (about 6 cups chopped and packed)
- 1/4 cup** (60 ml) olive oil, divided
- 2 large** cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 pound** (450 g) salmon fillets, cut in one-inch pieces
- Zest of 2** lemons, finely grated
- Juice of 2** lemons (about 1/4 cup / 60 ml), divided
- 1 375 g** package vermicelli noodles (or spaghetti)
- 4 oz** (113 g) grated Parmesan, divided
- Lemon slices** for garnish

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add kale, stir and boil for five minutes. Scoop kale out with a sieve and allow to drain for a minute. Cover pot and keep water hot for pasta.

2. Heat two tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic. Cook for a minute, stirring constantly. Add the kale, lemon zest, salt and a good grinding of black pepper. Cook, tossing often, until the kale is tender, about five minutes. Transfer kale to a large bowl.

3. Return the pan to the heat, add the remaining two tablespoons of oil and increase heat to medium-high. Cook the salmon, sprinkling with two tablespoons of lemon juice as you cook. Stirring gently, cook until salmon is cooked almost all the way through, but the centre remains pink, about five minutes. Transfer to a plate and cover with foil to keep warm.

4. Cook the pasta in boiling water until al dente (cooked yet still firm to the bite), about three minutes for vermicelli, eight



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minutes for spaghetti. Drain the pasta, add it to the kale, along with the remaining lemon juice, and half the Parmesan. Toss to coat pasta. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Divide pasta among four bowls, place one-quarter of the salmon on each, sprinkle

with remaining Parmesan and serve.
Serves 4

**You can use your favourite variety of kale. However, if removing the stems is cumbersome, substitute roughly chopped baby kale, stems and all.*