



# TAILORED TASTE TIDBITS

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## Sour

Tart, acidic, pucker-inducing, bad, off, distasteful, disagreeable, unpleasant, below standard

These are all terms I found when searching for a definition for 'sour.' This makes last quarter's topic, *bitter*, sound down-right tasty! But as with the other tastes our mouths can detect, sour is an important component in creating a balanced and pleasing sensation. For me, lemons and vinegar are the first two sour items that come to mind.

Vinegar by definition is sour. The roots of the word are French for *sour wine*. Vinegar is an alcohol such as wine, beer, rice wine, or cider that has fermented. There are several methods of creating vinegar and all involve the introduction of bacteria that grow and thrive on oxygen. The Orleans method takes place in wooden barrels filled with alcohol to which the acetobactor bacteria starter (known as the Mother) is introduced. Over time, the bacteria work their magic and vinegar is produced. Some is drawn off for use and additional liquids are added to the barrel to continue the process.

Most vinegar is used to flavor and/or preserve (pickle). Balsamic is used extensively for its unique flavor. Some aged balsamics are drizzled as-is on ice cream or strawberries. Cider vinegar adds an unusual undertone and is especially tasty in slaws and some chili. White vinegar excels at pickling (and taking corrosion off inanimate objects).

Straight up, a sour element such as lemon juice can provide the right amount of contrast a dish needs to really pop. A squeeze of lemon over broccoli or green beans brightens the vegetable. Seafood and lemon go hand in hand. A twist of lemon or lime in that gin & tonic helps offset the bitter-sweet tonic and the bite of the gin.

When combined with salt and oils, vinegars and other sour liquids like lemon and/or lime juice coalesce into a dressing that can make a bowl of lettuce come to life.

So see, there really is a place for ingredients described as tart, acidic, unpleasant, etc. and that place is in a well-balanced dish.



## Mardi Gras

In a (futile) attempt to run away from cold DC, we headed to New Orleans on a long-planned trip in January. It turned out to be smack-dab in the middle of a record cold

snap there. We did find a few indoor attractions besides restaurants or bars such as *Mardi Gras World* (est. 1947) a workshop/museum housing parade floats.



Fortified with a slice of King Cake, we were led through a huge warehouse where old floats become new floats as pieces/parts are reconfigured and recycled to reflect this year's theme. The scale of the floats is hard to imagine until you are standing beside a 40-foot dragon or 20-foot chef.

New Orleanians take Mardi Gras seriously (oxymoron?) as it has been an official city holiday since 1873 and huge city money-maker in recent years. Social clubs known as Krewees work year-round to design their floats and even spend their own money on the beads and plastic coins tossed from the floats.



Mardi Gras World is worth a stop if you are ever in the Big Easy.

[www.mardigrasworld.com](http://www.mardigrasworld.com)

## King Cakes

Now associated with Mardi Gras, the King Cake actually has its roots in pre-Christian European harvest festivals. A bean was baked into a cake and the person whose slice held the bean would be treated like a king for a year and then (this is the bad part) be sacrificed and his blood returned to the earth to ensure a good harvest the following season.

Happily, this tradition has morphed into something a bit more pleasant. When Christianity spread across Europe, previous pagan practices were re-tooled rather than abandoned entirely. So the King Cake became associated with Epiphany (Feast of Three Kings) and the bean became a small figurine of the baby Jesus.

French settlers to the Louisiana territory brought this tradition with them and the cake was served only from January 6 until the start of Lent. The lucky person who found the baby had to provide the next day's cake.

Current King Cakes are basic coffee cakes, some plain or cinnamon, some filled, some not. All are frosted in the



purple, gold and green of Mardi Gras, representing justice, power, and faith.

The icing is usually a classic combo

of powdered sugar, a little water and some lemon juice (there's that sour balancing the sweet sugar again).

If you want to partake of this fun tradition but don't want to make your own King Cake from scratch, there are bakeries in New Orleans who are glad to take your order and ship you one.

## Food for Thought – Seasonality

Eating seasonally is talked and written about ad nauseum these days, but living seasonally is another story.

A wise woman I know (my acupuncturist) once mentioned (in an effort to convince me to slow down) that of all the species, humans are the only ones that expect to perform at same high level year round.

All other species adjust their activities to the cycle of light and dark within a day. When there is less light, there is less activity. Some species actually hibernate when the days become short (doesn't that sound glorious?!) providing time to re-generate, re-charge for the coming longer days. Not humans – nope, we turn on the lights and keep going, leaving us tired and under-efficient.

But if you think about it, our response to light is inherent. I'll wager that you are not thrilled when we turn our clocks back in October and that first sunset occurs at 5:00 pm. Going to work in the dark, coming home in the dark are just not fun. I find that in winter I struggle with the evenings as I truly hate to start any projects after the sun goes down (including making dinner).

I think this is the winter I'll follow the lead of my pups, rein in my busy-ness and in my off-hours partake of more restful pursuits such as reading and watching LOST on Tuesday nights ☺



## Fairly Quick Lemon Curd

*(Adapted from a recipe by Jamie Gwen in Yum! Tasty Recipes from Culinary Greats)*

- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- ½ cup lemon juice (freshly squeezed)
- 8 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 pinch of salt

Place zest, juice & butter in a saucepan over low heat and stir until butter is completely melted.

In a large bowl, whisk sugar, egg and egg yolks together. Add this to butter mixture. Stir constantly over low heat until mixture thickens & coats back of a spoon. Season with pinch of salt.

Cool & store in fridge.

**Chef Monica Thomas, CPC**

**301.699.9597 or 240.299.6463**

**[chefmonica@tailoredtaste.net](mailto:chefmonica@tailoredtaste.net)**

**[www.tailoredtaste.net](http://www.tailoredtaste.net)**