

LEMON CURD & SHORTBREAD 'TART'



SERVES 8 - 12

INGREDIENTS

Shortbread pastry:

- 2 cups (300g) plain flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Pinch of salt (about 1/8th teaspoon)
- 250g unsalted butter, at cool room temperature
- 1 cup (220g) caster sugar
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- Icing sugar, for dusting
- Softly whipped cream, to serve

Lemon curd:

- 3 eggs
- 90g caster sugar
- ½ cup (125ml) strained, freshly-squeezed lemon juice (from approx. 1 ½ to 2 lemons)
- 90g unsalted butter, melted
- Finely grated zest of 1 large lemon
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METHOD

- Put the flour, baking powder and salt into the bowl of a food processor and whiz them together so they're thoroughly mixed. Tip them into a bowl.
- Cut the butter into rough chunks and put it in the food processor along with the caster sugar. Whiz for about 40 seconds until the mixture is pale and creamy (you may need to stop the machine and scrape down the sides once or twice). Add the egg yolks and vanilla, then process again for 15 seconds or so until well combined.
- Now add the flour mixture to the butter mixture and pulse the machine in short bursts until a ball of pastry forms around the blade (try not to over-do this mixing or the pastry may be a bit tough).
- Turn the pastry out onto a very lightly floured board and shape it into two equal-sized logs (if the pastry seems too soft to do this, chill it for a little while first so it firms up enough to handle comfortably. Wrap each log in baking paper, then pop them in the fridge and chill them for at least 3 hours (or you can leave them overnight) until they're really firm.



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METHOD CONTINUED

- While the pastry is chilling, make the lemon curd. (Having just written this sentence, I've realised I should have said that you can make the curd a week or so ahead of time, if you like.)
- Put the eggs and caster sugar into a medium-sized, heavy-based saucepan, and whisk them together with a balloon whisk until they're thoroughly combined but not too frothy. Whisking gently, mix in the lemon juice and then the melted butter.
- Sit the pan over medium/low heat. Cook the mixture, stirring constantly with a flat-based wooden spoon or sauce whisk, until it thickens to a lovely, custard-like consistency. As you stir, try to use a figure of 8-motion to cover the entire base of the pan so the curd doesn't 'catch' and burn. The most important thing of all is not to let it boil, otherwise it may curdle. As soon as it's ready, remove the curd from the heat and strain it through a fine sieve into a heatproof jug. Stir in the lemon zest, then cover the jug loosely with a sheet of greaseproof paper and leave the curd to cool. Once cool, cover the jug and pop it into the fridge. (It keeps up to 10 days).
- Preheat your oven to 180C and very lightly butter a 25cm loose-based tart tin.
- Remove one of the pastry logs from the fridge. Use the side of a box grater with the largest holes to grate the pastry onto a plate. I tend to do this in batches as the grater fills quite quickly and the pastry strands will squash if they become too compacted. As you finish each batch carefully transfer the grated dough to the prepared tin. When you have finished grating it, gently pat the dough strands out evenly over the base of the tin, trying not to squash them down too much.
- Now dollop the lemon curd evenly over the grated pastry, then smooth it out thinly as best you can with a palette knife, leaving a 1cm border all the way around the edges. Grate the remaining log of pastry the same way as before and sprinkle it over the lemon curd. Give it the lightest pat down to even it out.
- Carefully transfer the tin to the oven (watch out you don't 'pop' the base up – I've been known to do this!) and bake the 'tart for about 35 minutes, or until it's golden brown. Remove it from the oven and leave it to cool completely in the tin on a rack.
- To serve, carefully remove the tart from the tin to a serving plate, and dust it with icing sugar. Sometimes the tart may feel as though it's sticking to the tin and doesn't want to release from the base. If you find this happens, check underneath the tin to see if a bit of mixture has run out and stuck the base and sides of the tin together. If it has, use a fine palette knife to scrape away any crusted-on bits of pastry and the tart should then release freely.
- It's equally lovely served simply with a cup of tea or coffee, or as dessert with a spoonful of double thick cream.

