Fruits of Summer
9 Great Desserts To Give Every Meal The Perfect Ending This Season

Classic Outdoor Menus
Roasted Tomatoes,
Pan Seared Salmon,
Peppercorn Grilled
New York Steak,
Pasta With Eggplant,
Watermelon With
Prosecco Sorbet
And More

Plus
Almond Cream Tart
The Easiest, Best Dessert Ever!
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Inside Italy’s Food Science College
The Dreams of Positano

LEMON BLOSSOMS PERFUME THE AIR ALONG ITALY’S SPECTACULARLY SCENIC AMALFI COAST. CULTIVATED HERE FOR CENTURIES, THE LEMON FLAVORS RISOTTO, MARMALADE, CAKES AND LIQUEURS.

By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

The Tyrrhenian sea shimmers and whitewashed villas built with copula roofs cling to vertical cliffs. This is Positano on the Amalfi Coast where the houses are painted in a kaleidoscope of pastel colors from rose pink to butter yellow. It’s a ‘dream place,’ just as John Steinbeck described when he first visited in 1953. Although times have changed since Steinbeck’s visit, one thing has remained the same – the locals still dream about creating the perfect lemons and transforming them into sublime culinary confections.

Celeste Desiderio, or Mamma Celeste as everyone calls her, is an expert in cooking with lemons. And at 85 years old, she has been picking lemons since she was a child. “Spring produces the best lemons,” she says knowingly in Italian as she picks another one from the tree and places it in her straw basket. Reserved, yet charismatic, she is the matriarch behind B&B Casa Celeste, as well as the beach front restaurant da Ferdinando at il Fornillo. Each morning she walks down 425 stairs to meet her sons Guido and Marco, and grandsons Nando, Ferdinando and Francesco at the restaurant. She keeps a garden, swims daily and climbs 425 stairs each night after a hard day’s work. It is a family affair at da Ferdinando and Mamma heads up the kitchen. Stand-
ing just under five feet with twinkling eyes
that match the color of the sea she tells a
story of family, cooking and Positano
lemons.
“Lemons are a part of us, in our diet and
cooking,” she explains. “We use lemon for
everything, it’s always a good flavor and
healthy, too. From Suppli al Limone (rice
and lemon croquettes) to using lemon with
meat, fish, chicken, and even as a treatment
for your skin they are good. Family and food
are most important,” emphasizes Mamma
Celeste, as she recites the lemon recipes she
will be making today, Marmellata di
Limone, Scorzette – candied lemon peels,

stirs the simmering lemons in her copper
pot, saying, “it’s the trick to getting it, just
the right texture”. This type of hand-made pot
is called a pentola in rame and is perfect for
slow cooking.

Living on this divine coast will illuminate
more about Italy’s past than any schoolbook,
classroom or guidebook. Locals such as
Mamma Celeste, who generously share their
stories of war, invasions, pirates, family
recipes, cooking, folklore and lemons, make
the best teachers.

A little of what is known about lemons:
lemons made their way to Italy’s southern
coast in the first century B.C. brought by

Positano to Massa Lubrense along the
Amalfi Coast, a stretch of winding road that
curls like ribbon candy. The panorama is a
cerulean sea that meets rocky vertical cliffs
with dramatic hairpin turns. This road leads
to Antonio Gargiulo’s lemon grove where he
tells his story of lemons.

There are more than 45 different varieties
of lemons in the world, or 46 counting the
one he grafted on a grapefruit tree. Antonio,
who had studied law in England, returned
to the farm when he learned that his family
was about to sell their farm. “My family
started cultivating lemons in 1900,” he
explains. “At that time men worked the lemon

“ITALIANS GOT SERIOUS ABOUT LEMON CULTIVATION
AROUND 1795 WHEN THE BRITISH NAVY
MANDATED LEMON JUICE CONSUMPTION
FOR ITS SAILORS TO PREVENT SCURVY.”

Delizia al Limone - a sponge cake with
cream and lemon, and Limoncello - the
after dinner digestive. Smoked Provolone
grilled on lemon leaves is her personal fa-
vorite. Her basket now full, she heads to her
calendar ready to make Marmellata di
Limone, lemon marmalade.

Waiting there is Mamma’s daughter Mar-
cella, the pastry chef at da Vincenzo, her
family trattoria. Poised, blond and with a
striking resemblance to her mom, she too
enthusies over the Sfisato lemons. “I cannot
live without them,” she confides. “I use their
zest, juice and peels, they are magic!” Mar-
cella is renowned for her award-winning
Delizia al Limone, a delicate lemon and
cream cake.

The lemon process starts. First Mamma
firmly pricks each lemon with a fork and
places it in ice water, this process takes away
the bitterness. Her method is simple, no
strict measurements, just lots of lemons,
sugar and water; slow cooked until thick and
tasty, to the cook’s liking. She continually

Arab travelers, Alexander the Great also
carried lemons to the Amalfi Coast in 300 B.C.,
and they show up in paintings and mosaics
at Pompeii’s ‘Casa del Frutteto’ in 79 A.D.
Jesus fathers began cultivating them in Sor-
rento around 1600.

There are two types of lemons in southern
Italy’s Campania region, the Femminello
Ovale Sorrentino (or Massese) and the Sfisato’, he
reiterates. “The big difference between the
Femminello and Sfisato are the skin and
size. The Femminello Oval Sorrentino or
Massese, has a smooth skin, pale color and
stronger flavor. They are smaller too with an
oval egg shape. The Sfisato has an uneven
skin. Both types are glorified to be the best
lemons in the world, with few seeds and
twice as much vitamin C as an orange. The
skin contains the essential oils that give it its
flavor. The average lemon tree lives to be 70
years. It has one main root that grows deep
into the soil to anchor it and a skirt of small
superficial roots that grow around it,” Anto-
nio says.

Under a pergola abundant with lemons
and white lemon flowers (called zagara
in Italian), Antonio explains: “The main ingre-

groves and women worked the cattle. The
lemons from our farm were shipped to Bel-
gium where citrus did not exist,” he says.

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Limoncello

The peculiar microclimate of the Sorrento Peninsula helps the growth of the unique sfusato Amalfitano lemon: large fruit with thick and scented peel and with superior properties. The masseve, meaning 'from Massa,' lemon differs from the Amalfi Coast lemon in that it has a thinner peel and a stronger aroma.

Lemons were already being exported to the United States and to Great Britain in the 19th century. Whole books have been written about the medicinal value of this fruit, which contains twice as much vitamin C as an orange. In addition to vitamin C, lemons contain vitamins A and B1-8. The juice is useful for sore throats, mouth ulcers, liver and pancreatic tonics, stomach ulcers, arthritis, gout and rheumatism. Nowadays, they are used not only for health and culinary purposes, but also as the main ingredient of limoncello, a lemon liqueur obtained from an infusion of lemon peel. Limoncello is an authentic elixir, which is suitable as an aperitif, a digestive or as an evening drink with friends. The ingredients for limoncello are simple and few, and making a batch does not require much work.

5 organic lemons
2 cups vodka or Everclear
2 cups sugar
2 cups water

To begin, you need a large glass jar with a lid. Wash the lemons, pat them dry and remove the zest. A vegetable peeler does the job best; it gives you long wide strips of zest with hardly any of the bitter white pith. If you get some of the pith with the zest, carefully scrape it away with the tip of the knife.

Fill the jar with the alcohol and, as you remove the zest, add it to the jar. Mix the ingredients, cover the jar and store it. Now all you need to do is wait. After about 5 to 6 days, combine the sugar and the water in a saucepan. Bring it to a boil and cook until thickened, about five minutes. Let the syrup cool then add it to the limoncello mixture. Then simply strain the limoncello into bottles and discard the lemon zest.

Keep the bottles in the freezer so it is icy cold until you are ready to drink it.
Lemon Risotto

½ cup butter
1 white onion, finely chopped
1 pound risotto rice
4 ounces white wine
6 cups vegetable broth
3.5 ounces Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
Juice and zest of 4 lemons
Lemon-infused olive oil

In a large shallow pot, melt the butter and add the chopped onion. Add the rice and toast for a moment. Add the white wine and allow to evaporate. Add the broth a little at a time, stirring continuously and adding more as it absorbs. Cook for about 15 minutes.

Just before serving, add the grated Parmigiano, the lemon juice and the lemon zest. Serve immediately with a drizzle of lemon-infused olive oil, a garnish of grated Parmigiano and a bit of lemon zest.

Makes 4 servings.
-Recipe courtesy of Le Tre Sorelle, Positano

Sicilian Swordfish in a Lemon Caper Sauce

4 swordfish steaks, ½-inch thick
1½ cup flour
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 tablespoons olive oil, divided
Juice of 2 lemons
Zest of 1 lemon
½ cup minced fresh parsley
¼ cup capers, rinsed and drained

In a baking dish, stir together flour, salt and pepper. Pat the fish dry, then lightly coat them with the flour mixture.

In a large skillet, heat 4 tablespoons of olive oil on medium. When oil is almost smoking, add the fish and cook 3 to 4 minutes per side. Remove the fish and place on warm platter; cover with paper towels.

Quickly discard all the oil in skillet and add remaining 2 tablespoons oil to the skillet. Add the lemon juice, zest, parsley and capers and bring mixture to a boil. Serve sauce with fish.

Makes 4 servings.