



Limoncello

By Michele Carbone

My favorite summertime after-dinner digestivo is the limoncello made from the lemon trees in my mother's yard in Calabria. You can purchase limoncello in many locations in Italy and the US, but the pre-packaged bottles are never as good as the ones made from those homegrown, freshly-picked Calabrian lemons.

I've found that I can make a great limoncello using organic lemons from the supermarket. Of course, they aren't quite as great as those collected in the warm sunlight of my mother's garden, but they still make something delicious.

Even the process of making limoncello is a pleasure, because you breathe in the aroma of the fresh lemon zest as you prepare it. The only problem with this recipe is that you have to steep the lemon zest in alcohol for a week – or up to three weeks (depends on the point of view). I say 1 week is all that is needed before you finish the recipe.

Ingredients

- 20 organic lemons, preferably less-mature lemons with a very thick skin
- 1 Liter (4 ¼ cups) rectified spirit, or ethyl alcohol, such as Everclear (I do **not** recommend the use of vodka as a substitute, that is a terrible idea)
- ½ KG (2 ½ cups) sugar per liter of water
- 1 or 2 Liters (4 ¼ cups, or 8 ½ cups) 6 ½ cups) of water depending on how much you want to dilute the alcohol

Additional Supplies

- A microplane – One of the most important things about this recipe is that you need to use the lemon peel, avoiding the pith as much as possible. The pith gives the drink a bitter taste. Peeling the lemons “just so” used to be quite difficult, but the best tool is a microplane, which you can use to just get the peel of the citrus.
- A large glass jar with a cover. The jar needs to be able to hold at least 1 liter of liquid (more if you choose to double or triple this recipe).
- Another large glass jar that you use for the filtration process.
- Aluminum foil to cover the jar as the limoncello steeps in the rectified spirit.
- Glass bottles for the finished limoncello. You will need 2 1-liter bottles for this recipe.
- A store-bought permanent coffee filter.
- One or two #4 paper coffee filters.

How to make this recipe

- Wash and dry the lemons.
- Peel the lemons, making sure that you avoid including the pith.
- Chop the lemon zest, just a little bit.
- Pour the 1 liter (4 ¼ cups) of the rectified spirits into the clean glass jar, then add the lemon zest.

- Place the lid on the jar, then wrap it with aluminum foil or a cloth. The reason you cover it with aluminum foil is that the process is photo-sensitive. Therefore, you want to avoid exposing it to light during the one- to three-week steeping process.
- Shake the jar, then place it in a cool, dry, and dark place. Some people say that it's best to shake the bottle each day; others say just leave it alone. My mother leaves the bottle alone with a towel around it for at least one week, so I suggest you do it her way (moms know best)!
- **After the one-to-three week steeping period**, you're ready for the next steps.

Making the Simple Syrup

- In a very clean saucepan, heat 1 (or 2) liter(s) of purified water. Add, slowly, the sugar to the pan (per liter of water, thus, if you have 2 liters of water, add 1 kilogram of sugar) and stir it until the liquid is clear, meaning that the sugar has dissolved completely, creating a supersaturated sugar mixture.
- Allow the sugar-water to cool in a glass container.
- Strain the steeped limoncello mixture. Don't squeeze or try to push the saturated lemon zest in order to extract a few extra ml of limoncello.
- Once the limoncello spirits have been filtered, mix 1:1 or 1:2 with the sugar-water.
 - NOTE: Most people prefer a 1:2 ratio of infusion to water, which lowers the alcohol percentage. But my mother likes it strong
- Decant the limoncello into your clean glass bottles and cap them.
- While you can drink this right away, it's even better if you can store it in a dark place for a couple of weeks — or more — before putting it in the freezer.
- Italians keep limoncello in the freezer — it won't freeze.
- Enjoy after dinner in a shot glass.
- Remember that this is a highly alcoholic drink, so sip it.



Special Instructions for Lisa's Limoncello

Party Participants

Lisa provided you with two bottles, each containing 500 ml (3 and 1/4 cups) of simple syrup. Put these in your refrigerator when you get home: they need to stay cold.

Here's what you need on the day you are ready to complete the recipe:

- ❖ A funnel.
- ❖ The two bottles of simple syrup brought to room temperature.
- ❖ The Bell jar containing the lemon peel mixed with rectified spirits.
- ❖ The coffee filter Lisa provided.
- ❖ A large glass measuring cup or jar.
- ❖ Aluminum foil or towel.



Once you have assembled everything you need, follow these instructions:

- ❖ About a week after you get home with your limoncello party supplies, you will be ready to combine the infused lemon/rectified spirits with the simple syrup.
 - **Step 1:** Take the simple syrup out of the refrigerator and allow it to come to room temperature.
 - **Step 2:** Filter the infusion (using the coffee filter Lisa provided) into a large measuring cup or glass jar.
 - **Step 3:** Rinse and dry the large Bell jar that had contained the lemon and rectified spirits mixture.
 - **Step 4:** Using the large Bell jar, combine the filtered infusion with the two bottles of simple syrup. Gently shake or stir the combined infusion.
 - **Step 5:** Using a funnel pour the infusion back into the two limoncello labeled glass bottles.
 - **Step 6:** Cover each bottle with foil (or towel), and put them in a dark cabinet at **room** temperature.
- ❖ This is the hardest part—WAIT for at least 2 weeks before putting one of the bottles into your freezer.
 - Over time, the sugar/alcohol mixture becomes more and more “mellow” tasting. I didn’t believe it when someone told me that, but a bottle that has aged at room temperature for 2 weeks tastes very different than one that has aged for even longer. I have aged my limoncellos at room temperature for up to a year.
 - Put the second bottle into the freezer **only** when you have drunk most of the first bottle. You can do a little tasting test after it’s cold to compare the flavors of the two bottles. Let me know if you can taste the difference!
- ❖ If you have any questions, just email Beth (bettichambers@gmail.com) or Lisa (lisa.correnti69@gmail.com). We’ll gladly help out.

Variations on a Theme

Maybe you'd like to try making a LIME 'cello, or an ORANGE 'cello, or even a MANDARIN 'cello...any citrus fruit will work! The only trick is that you have to guess at how much of the zest to use. I basically just look at the size of the fruit, and the amount of zest it produces and estimate the amount I need.

Here are some quantities I've experimented with (these are suggested per liter of alcohol)

- ❖ Oranges – I use the zest of 12-14 oranges. I also soak a vanilla bean with the infusion for one or two days. Infuse for at least 7 to 14 days.
- ❖ Limes – Use the zest of 20 limes. Because limes have very thin skins, you will need to use a zester in order to obtain the zest. Infuse for at least 7 to 14 days.
- ❖ Mandarins – Use the zest of 20 mandarins. Infuse for at least 7 to 14 days.
- ❖ Pink grapefruit – I use the zest of 9 – 11 grapefruits. Infuse for at least 7 to 14 days

Crema Recipe

Our friend Carlo introduced us to his Crema recipe. Basically, instead of mixing the filtered, infused alcohol with simple syrup, mix it with a cream-based syrup. Generally, you want the cream-based recipes (crema) to be lower in alcohol, so you should always mix the alcohol with the crema in a 1:2 ratio (1 part infused alcohol per 2 parts crema).

Here's how to prepare the crema.

These are the proportions for 500 ml of lemon-or-orange infusion. Thus, you need to double this recipe for a liter of the infusion, triple it for 1.5 liters of infusion, etc.

- 750 gm granulated sugar
- 400 ml heavy cream
- 600 ml milk (I use 2%)
- 2 vanilla beans, or 2 drops vanilla bean paste per liter (optional)

For example, if I have 750 ml of the infusion (filtered alcohol that has been infused with the fruit), then I need to make 750 x 2, or 1500 ml (1.5 liters) of the crema. So I would mix the following: (750 x 1.5, or 1125 g sugar) + (400 x 1.5, or 600 ml heavy cream) + (600 x 1.5, or 900 ml 2% milk) + 3 drops of vanilla bean paste. Once it cools, I would add it to the infused alcohol.

1. In a pan, heat the milk and cream.
2. Stir in the sugar and allow the mixture to come almost to a boil. Keep stirring so that you don't burn the milk.

3. Turn off the heat. If you want to add vanilla, add it once you've turned off the heat, and allow it to remain in the mixture until it cools.
4. Once the mixture gets to room temperature, you can mix it with the filtered alcohol infusion.
5. **Refrigerate for 2 weeks, then put in freezer.**