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LEMON BREADPUDDING

Makes 12 portions

This is a taste thrill when served at any temperature, but it is most spectacular right out of the oven. The lemon curd can be prepared days or even weeks ahead; the bread can be sliced and toasted a day or so ahead if you wish; the pudding can be put together (in about 5 minutes) one hour before it is baked, and it can bake while dinner is being served. It is an easy and foolproof recipe.

LEMON CURD

3 large eggs plus
1 egg yolk
1 cup sugar
Finely grated zest of
2 large lemons
½ cup lemon juice
4 ounces (1 stick) unsalted butter,
cut into 1-inch pieces

BREAD PUDDING

1 loaf (8 ounces) French bread
10 large eggs
1¼ cups sugar
4 cups milk
¼ teaspoon salt
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract

For the lemon curd:

In the top of a large double boiler, beat the eggs and yolk with the sugar to mix. Stir in the lemon zest and juice. Add the butter. Place over hot water on moderate heat. Cook uncovered, stirring and scraping the pan frequently with a rubber spatula, for 15 to 20 minutes, until the mixture is as thick as mayonnaise; it will register 180 degrees on a candy thermometer.

Remove the top of the double boiler and set aside to cool, stirring occasionally.

You can use the curd as soon as it has cooled, or you can refrigerate it for several weeks.

For the bread pudding:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

With a serrated French bread knife, slice the bread ½ inch thick. Place the slices on cookie sheets and bake for 10 to 15 minutes, until dry but not brown, turning the slices over when half-done. Set aside.

In a large bowl, beat the eggs and 1 cup of the sugar (reserve the remaining ¼ cup sugar). Beat in the milk, salt, and vanilla and set aside.

Butter a shallow, oblong 3-quart baking dish (13 x 8 [or 9] x 2 inches). In the bottom of the baking dish, place a layer of the bread slices touching each other. If necessary, break a few of the slices to fill in

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spaces. Spread half of the cooled or cold lemon curd over the bread. Then make a second layer of the bread slices, placing these slices at right angles to the first slices. Again, break a few slices if necessary to fill in space. You may have a few slices left over that you will not need. Spread the remaining curd over the top.

Now ladle the egg-and-milk mixture slowly all over the top. Let stand at room temperature for 1 hour.

Before baking, adjust a rack to the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

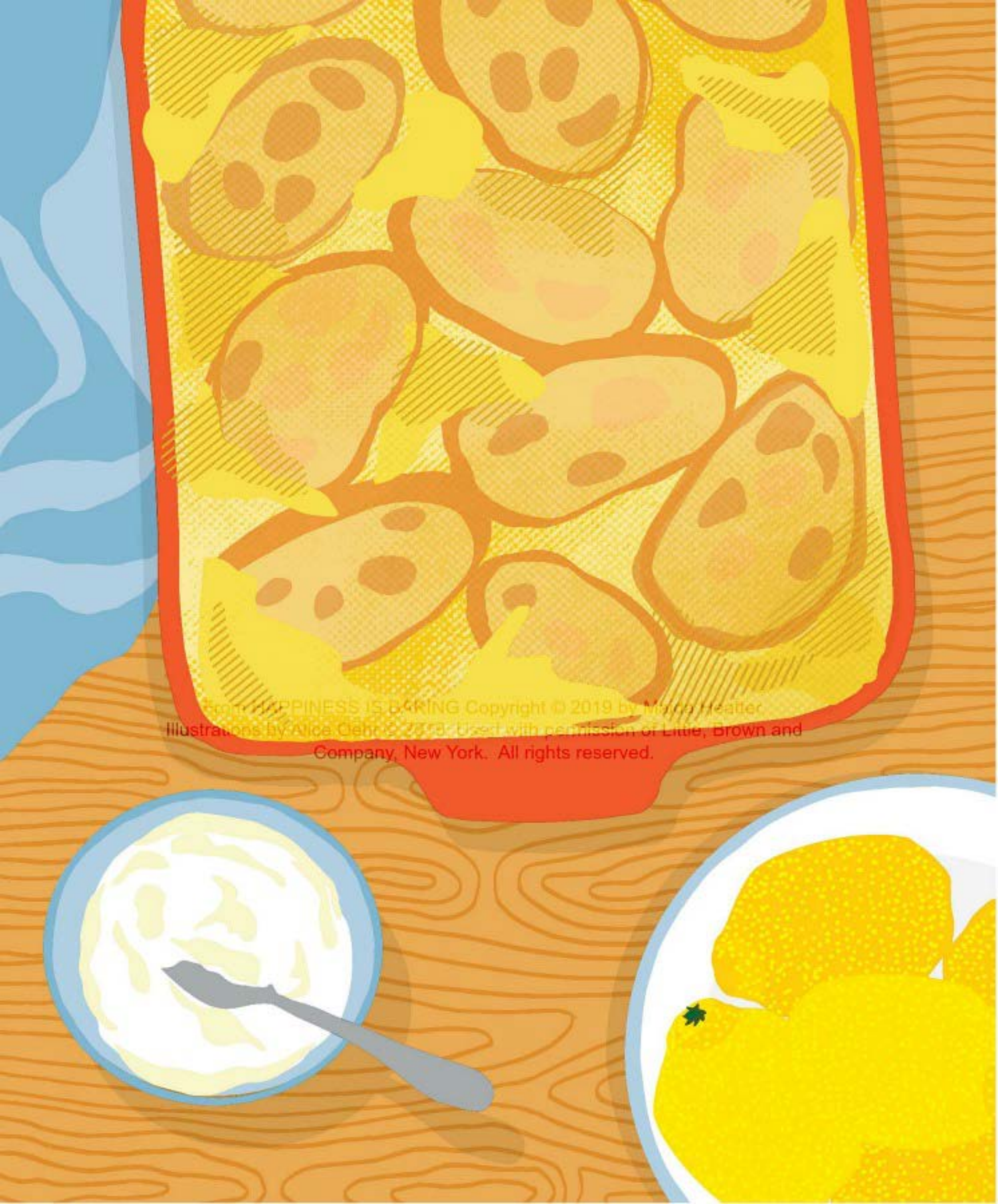
Sprinkle the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar evenly over the pudding.

Place the baking dish in a large, shallow pan, place in the oven, and then pour hot water into the pan to about half the depth of the baking dish.

Bake for about 45 minutes, until the top is puffed and just barely colored. Testing this with the point of a knife (the way custard is generally tested) is not good, because the lemon curd will cling to the blade even after the custard is done. It is better to tap the side of the baking dish lightly – when the middle of the pudding moves only slightly, it is done. (I have made this many times, and now all I do is test the oven temperature with a portable thermometer and watch the clock carefully.)

If necessary, you may place the baking dish under the broiler for just a few seconds to darken the top, but only until barely golden.

Serve right away – piping hot – or at room temperature.



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