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MEYER LEMON BLUEBERRY BUTTERMILK CUSTARD

MAKES ABOUT 2½ PINTS

Oh California, paradise of produce, land of the Meyer lemon, a smooth-skinned fruit with a milder acidity and more complex flavor than the everyday lemon. In our L.A. kitchen, a glut of citrus inspired us to devise an ice cream that's both super bright and super rich. The tang of lemon and buttermilk sets the stage for dense, egg yolk-fortified ice cream and sweet blueberry jam that's swirled in to keep the push-pull of flavors going. If you can't get Meyer lemons, this is still super yummy with regular ones.

WHAT WE LEARN: *Only rarely at Salt & Straw do we use a custard base, a concoction of egg yolks and dairy that spins to a particularly creamy texture. The yolks do a few things here: chief among them, they add flavor and they act as an emulsifier so that you can exceed the upper limit of butterfat in your ice cream, which maxes out at 18% with dairy alone. The yolks let you make an over-the-top ice cream without literally churning butter. And our custard base is actually much easier to make than traditional ones that call for you to boil the dairy, carefully whisk it into the eggs without cooking them, then slowly cook the mixture while stirring so you don't scramble the eggs. In ours, you just heat the dairy, whisk it into the eggs, and you're done. FYI: The eggs don't get fully cooked, so beware if you're not into that sort of thing.*

For the buttermilk custard base

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 tablespoons dry milk powder
¼ teaspoon xanthan gum (**See Note**)
4 large egg yolks
2 tablespoons light corn syrup
1½ cups heavy cream
1½ cups buttermilk

MAKE THE BASE

Combine the ½ cup sugar, the dry milk powder, and the xanthan gum in a small bowl and stir well. In a large bowl, combine the egg yolks and the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar and whisk until the yolks are lighter in color, about 1 minute.

In a medium pot, combine the corn syrup and the cream. Add the sugar mixture and immediately whisk vigorously until smooth. Set the pot over medium heat and cook, stirring often and adjusting the heat if necessary to prevent a simmer, until the sugar has fully dissolved, about 3 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat. Start whisking the yolk mixture and continue to whisk constantly while slowly drizzling the hot cream into the yolks.

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Add the buttermilk and whisk until fully combined. Transfer the base to an airtight container and refrigerate until well chilled, at least 6 hours, or for even better texture and flavor, 24 hours. It can be further stored in the fridge for up to 1 week or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

For the lemon blueberry ice cream

Grated zest (use a Microplane) and juice of 1 Meyer lemon

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

½ cup Blueberry Jam (recipe follows), or ½ cup store-bought jam mixed with freshly squeezed lemon juice to taste

MAKE THE ICE CREAM

In a bowl, combine the (very cold) buttermilk custard base, lemon zest and juice, and salt and whisk to get the lemon fully incorporated. Pour the mixture into an ice cream maker and turn on the machine. Churn just until the mixture has the texture of soft-serve (see note below for timing ranges, depending on the machine).

Stir the jam with a fork to loosen it. Alternate spooning layers of the custard and dolloping blueberry jam over each spoonful in freezer-friendly containers.

Cover with parchment paper, pressing it to the surface of the ice cream so it adheres, then cover with a lid. It's okay if the parchment hangs over the rim. Store it in the coldest part of your freezer (farthest from the door) until firm, at least 6 hours. It will keep for up to 3 months.

BLUEBERRY JAM

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

1 pint fresh blueberries

2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 tablespoon pectin

1 cup granulated sugar

In a food processor, puree the blueberries. In a medium pot, heat the blueberry puree, lemon juice, and pectin over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, until it reaches a boil. Stir in the sugar and continue to cook over medium-high heat until the mixture comes back to a boil. Immediately remove the pot from the heat and let the jam cool to room temperature. Chill the jam thoroughly before using. It can be stored in the fridge for up to 3 months.

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Note: *THE SECRET SUPERHERO OF ICE CREAM*

Every recipe in this book uses xanthan gum in its base. Now, I know what you're thinking (it's exactly what I thought when I first heard of it): "Xanthan gum" sounds funny. It starts with an "x"! It must be impossible to find and it must be bad. Well, it's not and it's not! It's easy to get, not just online but at most supermarkets. It's sold by ubiquitous brands like Bob's Red Mill and Hodgson Mill. Second, although that "x" makes it sound especially unnatural, xanthan gum is no stranger than cornstarch or baking soda.

Xanthan gum has one vital purpose at Salt & Straw: We use it to combat heat shock. To think about how, consider the effect that the more familiar gelatin has on water. Like xanthan gum, gelatin is a hydrocolloid. And as anyone who has made Jell-O knows, gelatin can halt the flow of water. While technically xanthan gum's actual effect on water is slightly different, the upshot is the same. It inhibits the mobility of the melted ice crystals (a.k.a. water) in ice cream, so the water has a harder time migrating to and refreezing onto those remaining crystals, making undesirable growth produced by heat shock less likely.

Some large companies use xanthan and other gums to mimic the texture of fat as well—so they can cut back on pricey cream—but the crutch comes with its own cost. Leaning too heavily on the stuff gives the product a gummy, teeth-coating texture that lingers on your palate a bit too long, like that guy at the party who hangs out after everyone else has gone home. Just the right amount of xanthan gum, on the other hand, is miraculous. At no cost to ice cream quality, you get insurance against ice crystal growth, bumpers in the bowling lane of perfection, a little leeway for when the world inevitably conspires against you. It's the lone ice cream-making decision at Salt & Straw that makes our lives easier, not harder. And being freed from that worry lets us be more daring on other fronts. My hope is that the freedom encourages you to make more ice cream! And while most homemade ice creams are best eaten within a few days, xanthan gum is one of the reasons why the ice creams in this book keep for three months!

CHURNING NOTES

THE THREE TYPES OF ICE CREAM MAKERS

I recommend a 1½-quart capacity machine for these recipes, though, as overloading a 1-quart machine can prevent your ice cream from freezing properly.

HAND-CRANK

Churning Time: Hand-crank machines will generally turn your liquid mixture to ice cream in 5 to 15 minutes, depending on your arm strength.

Hot Cold Tip: If you use a hand-crank device, try this: Rather than a mixture of ice and salt, use ice and an intense salt brine (a one-to-one salt-to-water ratio by volume). That gets things cooler quicker.

FROZEN BOWL

Churning Time: Frozen-bowl machines will generally turn your liquid mixture to ice cream in 20 to 30 minutes, provided that the mixture you use is already very cold from the fridge,

INTERNAL COMPRESSOR

Churning Time: Most machines with an internal compressor will turn your liquid mixture to ice cream in 30 to 40 minutes. Super-fancy ones will take 12 to 18 minutes.

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