

Sweet lemon  
Citrus limetta,  
Sapindales  
Rutaceae



Citrus limetta, alternatively considered to be a cultivar of Citrus limon, C. limon

'Limetta', is a species of citrus, commonly known as mousami, musami, sweet lime, sweet lemon, and sweet limetta, it is a member of the sweet lemons. It is small and round like a common lime in shape.

## Description/Taste

Sweet lemons are a medium to large varietal, averaging 6 to 7 centimeters in diameter, and have a round to oval shape with a slightly flattened base. The fruits also showcase a distinct nipple on one end and ripen from green to bright yellow, sometimes yellow-orange. The peel is thin, taut, and semi-smooth, covered in prominent sunken oil glands giving the surface a pebbled, textured feel. Underneath the peel, the flesh is divided by thin white membranes into 9 to 10 segments, and the pale-yellow flesh is tender, aqueous, and pulpy, either being found seedless or containing a few cream-colored seeds. Sweet lemons should feel heavy for their size and emit a sweet, honeyed scent when sliced or scratched. The flesh has low acidity, creating a mild, floral, sweet, and subtly tangy flavor.

# Current Facts

Sweet lemons, botanically classified as *Citrus limetta*, are acid-less fruits belonging to the Rutaceae family. The term Sweet lemon is a general descriptor used for several varieties of sweet, subtly tangy fruits that contain low acidity. It is important to note that Sweet lemons are not true lemons but are a natural hybrid between two citrus species. Sweet lemons are native to Asia and have been commercially grown for centuries for their sweet flavor. Over time, Sweet lemons were transported along trade routes and were planted throughout the Mediterranean basin, Middle East, and India, eventually introduced into the New World in California and Mexico. Sweet lemons are known as Sweet Limetta, Limetta, Mediterranean Sweet lemon, Limu Shirin in Iran, Musami in Pakistan, and Mosambi, Mausambi, Mitha Nimboo, or Musambi in India. There are also several named varieties, including

Millsweet, Moroccan limetta, and the Ponderosa Sweet lemon. Sweet lemons were traditionally used in medicinal beverages for colds and flu, but the juice has also become a popular flavoring for refreshing drinks sold through local vendors worldwide. In the modern-day, Sweet lemons have become a boutique home garden citrus selected for their easy-to-grow nature, high yields, everbearing quality, and ability to be purchased in dwarf, semi-dwarf, and standard sizes. The acid-less lemons have a very mild, sometimes insipid flavor, but their sweet taste can be incorporated into a wide array of beverages, seasonings, oils, and culinary dishes.

## Nutritional Value

Sweet lemons are an excellent source of vitamin C to strengthen the immune system while reducing inflammation and contain other nutrients, including vitamin A, fiber, calcium, potassium, folate, and niacin. Sweet lemon juice also contains flavonoids, compounds that have

antioxidant-like properties to protect the cells against the damages caused by free radicals. The lemon juice is often used in natural medicines to prevent colds and flu and is mixed with hot water and honey to reduce fevers, sore throats, and infections.



## Applications

Sweet lemons have a mild, acid-less flavor well suited for sweet and savory preparations. The fruits can be consumed straight, out of hand, and are commonly sliced into wedges similar to orange slices. Sweet lemons can also be sliced and tossed into salads, layered into parfaits,

tossed into fruit bowls, juiced into marinades, vinaigrettes, and dressings, served as a garnish alongside main dishes, desserts, and appetizers. In addition to consuming the lemons whole, Sweet lemons can be pressed and used to flavor soups, sparkling beverages, smoothies, and lemonades, or they can be steeped into a tea. They can also be incorporated into cakes, cheesecakes, muffins, and candies, blended into sorbet and sherbet, or mixed into a custard. Try candying the peels for a sweet treat. The peels can also be steeped and preserved in a simple syrup. Sweet lemons pair well with fruits such as strawberries, blueberries, oranges, coconut, mangoes, kiwis, and grapefruit, herbs including mint, basil, lavender, and lemongrass, meats such as poultry, lamb, and beef, seafood, vanilla, and spices such as cinnamon, cloves, cumin, coriander, fennel seeds, and ginger. Whole, unwashed Sweet lemons will keep 1 to 2 weeks when stored at room temperature and 2 to 4 weeks when kept in the refrigerator. Fresh juice may also be frozen for six months,

and fruit slices can be frozen in simple syrup.

## Ethnic/Cultural Info

In California, one type of Sweet lemon, known as the Millsweet, was rumored to have been planted at the San Gabriel Mission in 1822. The San Gabriel Mission was the 4th mission built in California, established in 1771, and was known for its elaborate gardens filled with fruits, vegetables, and grapevines. Padre Zalvidea designed the garden, and by the end of his tenure in 1826, the gardens were thought to have over 2,000 types of fruity trees, including Sweet lemons. The gardens were planted to provide food for the padres, visiting guests, and local workers, and many of the gardens were designed systemically to create a beautiful, functional, and pleasing landscape. At the San Gabriel Mission, one of the padre's favorite drinks was known as refresco, a beverage traditionally made from sugar, water, and lemon. The drink was similar to lemonade and was often served to

workers on hot sunny days as a refreshment. Simple refrescos are still made in the modern-day. While the drink is mostly made with standard lemons, Sweet lemons can sometimes be used and mixed with ice and water without the need for sugar.



## Geography/History

Sweet lemons are native to Asia and have been cultivated in subtropical to tropical regions since ancient times. Much of the history of Sweet lemons is unknown, but



experts believe Sweet lemons are descendants of the citron or *Citrus medica*, an Asian citrus with a fragrant, sweet, and acidic nature. Sweet lemon production is centralized in regions of the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, and India. Over time, the hybrid citrus was also introduced to the New World and was planted in the United States in the 19th century and parts of Mexico and Central America. Today Sweet lemons are commercially grown on a small scale and are sold through local markets, retailers, and grocers. They are also cultivated in home gardens and are offered through farmer's markets and specialty distributors.