

## Tea-Soaked Dates with Honey-Lemon Mascarpone Cheese

Jen Gilman

This recipe was inspired by Julia Turshen's "Small Victories," (pp. 282-83) – the simplicity of her recipe put me at ease and the gorgeous photographs of the dates on p. 283 made my mouth water.

Because our post-holiday mixer *didn't* need to be a recipe I had never made before, I did a small batch "dry run" of Turshen's simple dessert. I was a bit ... underwhelmed. Yes, I love dates, and I've never met a cheese I didn't like – but it seemed like it was missing a little pizzazz.

The foundation was definitely there, though – so I took to the Internet. With the dates-stuffed-with-mascarpone idea in mind, I ran a few searches and quickly found "Two Red Bowls" Tea-Soaked Dates With Mascarpone (<http://tworedbowls.com/2017/02/08/tea-soaked-dates-mascarpone/>). Cynthia, the author of the "Two Red Bowls" blog, was also inspired by Turshen's mascarpone-stuffed dates, but added the tea-soaked element to it.

Now, I love tea – especially a strong builder's tea – and I love dates, and I love mascarpone, so there's a lot of love in this recipe. I whipped up another "dry run" and found that the tea mellowed the dates out and added a bit of umami, but also made them mushy and unmanageable. Cynthia's only "instruction" was that she "soaked the dates in a bit of strong black tea." What she *didn't* say was that if you soak them too long, they fall apart and all of their sweetness is leached into the water. This is great if you're making date paste, but not so great if you want to hold and eat the dates.

I wasn't giving up on the idea of tea-soaked dates, though. So I experimented with soaking dates in tea, and found that the way that worked best for me was to first brew the tea, then put the halved dates in a bowl with another tea bag (which makes the tea even stronger), then pour the hot brewed tea into the bowl for exactly *five* minutes. Strain (reserving liquid) gently pat the halved dates dry, set them on a plate, and refrigerate. The dates will maintain their integrity but still benefit from the tea yumminess. As an aside, while the dates are cooling down in the fridge, you should definitely drink the tea you've strained from the dates. It's sweet and amazing.

Still, though ... even once the dates were soaked in tea, the recipe was missing something. I returned to consulting with Chef Google. There, I found a FOOD & WINE recipe by Chef Jennifer Jasinski for Lemon Mascarpone-Stuffed Dates (<http://www.foodandwine.com/recipes/lemon-mascarpone-stuffed-dates>). This is a *serious* recipe that I intend to make someday. But, for our mixer, I wanted a lighter dessert than Chef Jasinski's recipe offers. I totally stole the good stuff, though! She makes an intense mix of mascarpone cheese, lemon juice, and honey, which I imagine is quite good in her recipe after you add the prosciutto, pepper, and parsley – but not what I intended for my dessert. So I toned it down by decreasing the ratio of honey and lemon juice to mascarpone cheese, and omitting the other ingredients.

Add this to the tea-soaked dates, and I had something.

Without further ado, here's the recipe:

## **Tea-Soaked Dates with Honey-Lemon Mascarpone Cheese**

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### **Ingredients:**

- 20 Medjool dates, pitted and halved
- Two tea bags of any black tea, such as PG Tips
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ½ tablespoon honey
- 4 oz. Mascarpone cheese

### **Instructions:**

#### **Dates**

1. Using one of the tea bags, brew a strong builder's tea.
2. Place the halved dates and the second tea bag in a large bowl. Pour the builder's tea over the dates and unused tea bag so that the dates are completely covered. Allow to soak for *five* minutes. Strain immediately, reserving the strained tea for drinking, if desired.
3. Gently pat dates dry, arrange in a single layer on a plate, and refrigerate while making the Mascarpone Cheese Mixture.

#### **Mascarpone Cheese Mixture**

4. Mix lemon juice and honey in a small bowl.
5. Add Mascarpone cheese and mix until very creamy.

#### **Assemble**

6. Fill the centers of the halved dates with the Mascarpone Cheese Mixture and refrigerate until ready to serve.

**ENJOY!**