

Lemon & Vanilla Shortbread Bars

By [Ashley Alexander](#)

**Gather
& Feast**

If you explore the cookie category on my website, it will become evident that a shortbread-style cookie is one of my favourites. Buttery, flaky, with minimal ingredients and fuss, it is truly a delicious sweet treat. These lemon and vanilla shortbread bars exemplify this. They are the perfect blend of buttery goodness, a hint of sweetness, and scents of vanilla and lemon. Ideal for any day, but especially perfect for the festive season.

MAKES 16 bars | **PREP TIME** 15 min | **COOK TIME** 22 min | **TOTAL TIME** 37 min + cooling time

INGREDIENTS

- 140g (2/3 cup) castor sugar
- Zest of 3 lemons
- 250g salted butter, at room temperature
- 1 1/2 tablespoons vanilla bean paste
- 250g (2 cups) plain/all-purpose flour
- Flaky sea salt, for sprinkling (optional)

METHOD

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C/350°F.
2. In a large mixing bowl or using a stand mixer, combine the sugar and lemon zest, ensuring thorough mixing.
3. Set aside 1 1/2 tablespoons of the lemon sugar for sprinkling later.
4. Add the softened butter and vanilla to the lemon sugar, creaming the mixture together until it becomes light and fluffy.
5. Gradually fold in the plain flour until the dough is well combined.
6. Press the dough firmly into a 9x9-inch baking tin lined with baking paper.
7. Bake at 180°C/350°F for 22 minutes.
8. Remove from the oven, and sprinkle with a pinch of flaky sea salt (optional).



9. Allow the shortbread to cool in the tin for about 20 minutes before slicing.
10. Slice into 16 bars and let them cool completely to set.
11. Store the cooled shortbread in an airtight container at room temperature for up to a week.

NOTES

Mixing the lemon zest into the sugar initially helps the lemon flavour thoroughly infuse the cookie bars, while also providing the perfect opportunity to set aside a portion for sprinkling over the top of the bars before baking.

Room temperature butter is crucial; we don't want it too soft as it can affect the texture of the bars in the end. I find that butter at room temperature is ideal, still firm enough, yet soft enough to combine with the sugar and then fold in the flour.

I've opted for salted butter in the recipe as it imparts the best flavour, eliminating the need to add extra salt. However, if you only have unsalted butter on hand, be sure to include a generous pinch of sea salt in the recipe.

Vanilla bean paste adds intense flavour and visible vanilla specks to the shortbread. If unavailable, you can substitute with vanilla extract.

The specified baking time of 22 minutes is quite precise, providing the perfect balance. I discovered that 20 minutes didn't achieve the desired colour, but 25 minutes was too long. Keep in mind that every oven is different, so keep an eye on them. If they appear golden at 20 minutes, feel free to remove them from the oven.

The flaky sea salt is optional and adds a subtle contrast to the sweetness. Sprinkle sparingly if you choose to use it.

For slicing the bars, wait about 20 minutes after they've cooled. Slicing too soon may cause them to crumble, but allowing them to cool completely makes them more challenging to cut and can also lead to crumbling. Aim to slice them 20-30 minutes after they come out of the oven, then allow them to cool completely before eating to ensure they have ample time to set properly.

Store the cooled shortbread in an airtight container at room temperature. It should remain fresh for up to a week.



Find the recipe and watch the video online:

<https://www.gatherandfeast.com/lemon-vanilla-shortbread-bars>

Let me know if you make the recipe! x **@gatherandfeast**