Sauces / France

Lemon Butter Sauce (Beurre Blanc au Citron)

A shallot-and-lemon reduction finished with a cascade of cold butter: trembling, pale gold, and impossibly light for something made almost entirely of fat — the kind of sauce that makes simple pan-seared fish transcend itself. The science is elementary; the execution demands complete attention and cold butter.

Time 25 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 60 g Shallots, finely minced
- ☐ 80 ml Dry white wine
- ☐ 40 ml White wine vinegar
- ☐ 30 ml Fresh lemon juice
- ☐ 30 ml Heavy cream
- ☐ 200 g Unsalted butter, cold, cut into 1 cm cubes
- ☐ 3 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 1 g White pepper, freshly ground
- ☐ 4 g Lemon zest, finely grated
- ☐ 5 g Fresh chives, finely cut (optional finish)

Let's make it.

01 Combine the minced shallots, white wine, white wine vinegar, and lemon juice in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to maintain a brisk simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has reduced to roughly 2–3 tablespoons — you should be able to see the pan bottom clearly between shallot pieces, and the liquid should look syrupy and concentrated. This takes 6–8 minutes. The reduction does two things simultaneously: it concentrates the acidity that will counterbalance the richness of the butter, and it softens the shallots until they are completely tender and mellow. The sharp bite of raw shallot and vinegar should smell mellower and more round by the time the reduction is ready. Do not rush — an under-reduced base produces a watery, acidic sauce that will not emulsify properly.

02 Add the heavy cream to the shallot reduction. Bring to a boil and reduce by half — this takes only 60–90 seconds. The cream serves two functions: it adds a small amount of dairy fat that stabilizes the emulsion you are about to build, and its proteins create a physical net that helps hold the butter droplets in suspension even if the temperature fluctuates slightly. A traditional beurre blanc does not include cream, but the cream-enriched version is far more stable and forgiving for home cooking — it will hold its emulsion for longer and tolerate slightly higher temperatures without breaking. The reduction should look slightly thickened and ivory-colored when ready.

03 This is the mounting step — the heart of beurre blanc. Remove the pan from the heat entirely, or reduce to the absolute lowest flame. The goal temperature is 60–80°C (140–176°F) — hot enough to melt butter, too cool to break the emulsion. Add the cold butter cubes two at a time, whisking constantly between each addition. The cold butter does two things: it melts and its fat disperses into tiny droplets throughout the reduction, and its cold temperature helps regulate the pan's heat, preventing it from climbing too high. Wait until each addition is almost fully absorbed before adding the next — you should see the sauce thicken and become creamy with each addition. If the sauce looks greasy or the butter is melting but not emulsifying (clear fat on top), the pan is too hot. Move it briefly off heat and whisk more vigorously. Once all the butter is incorporated, season with salt, white pepper, and lemon zest. Add chives if using. Strain through a fine sieve if you want a refined sauce without the shallot pieces; serve unstrained for a more rustic presentation. Serve immediately — the emulsion is live and will break if reheated above 80°C.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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