

Simple Lemon Aioli Recipe

This recipe will let you take mayonnaise, either store-bought or homemade, and quickly create a tasty aioli sauce. I have a strong preference for homemade mayonnaise, and you can get my recipe for it along with a discussion on mayonnaise and aioli at my blog post:

<https://billwinetravelfood.com/2024/12/02/what-is-aioli-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-mayonnaise/>

If using store-bought, I recommend a good olive oil based mayonnaise that has sweeteners further down the list of ingredients so it is less sweet.

Aioli means “garlic and oil” in the Catalan region of Spain (Barcelona) and the Provence region of southern France. So, in its simplest terms, adding some garlic to mayonnaise, which is an emulsion of egg yolk and oil with some acid like lemon juice, turns mayonnaise into an aioli. Raw garlic has a very strong taste, so this recipe uses lemon juice to “cook” crushed garlic just as lemon juice is used to cook seafood in ceviche dishes. When the garlic and the lemon juice used to cook the garlic are added to the mayonnaise you quickly have a simple but very tasty aioli.

To make 1 cup of Aioli use 1 large or 2 medium sized cloves of garlic. For smaller portions, use smaller cloves. I have used a very small clove with just two tablespoons of mayonnaise to quickly make a tiny portion of aioli.

If you cut off the tail of the clove, where it is flat, and then press down with the flat of a chef’s knife, the clove will start to be crushed and the skin will come off the clove and along with the head or pointy end of the clove. The two ends and the skin can be easily removed and put in the garbage leaving just the clove on the cutting board. The clove should be finely chopped and then crushed. I cut the clove in long slices and then cut those slices in narrow strips. I line up the strips and cut across them to get very small cubes of garlic. With your hand on the flat blade of chef’s knife, as you did when you crushed the garlic to remove the skins, you can move the knife in a small circular motion against the finely chopped garlic on the cutting board and crush it down to close to a paste. Be sure to keep your hand well away from the cutting edge of the knife when doing this. If you search youtube videos for “Jaques Pepin crushed garlic” you will see a great short video of him doing this. As he notes, the crushing is releasing the oils from the garlic with is makes them available to the dish you are making so you want to use your knife to carefully scrape all the crushed garlic and the oils into a small bowl.

Before cutting a couple of wedges of lemon to get the juice, you might want to zest the lemon so you can add zest to your aioli if you want some more lemon flavor. Squeeze the juice from enough wedges to fully cover the garlic in the bowl. Take any seeds from the lemon out of the bowl. Let the lemon juice “cook” the garlic for at least 15 minutes. Then

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pour the lemon juice into another bowl so you can control how much juice and zest you want to use in your aioli. Add the garlic to your mayonnaise, homemade or good store-bought, and stir it in and taste. Add the lemon juice from the cooking, and some zest if you did that, to the aioli to taste. The lemon juice used to cook the garlic will bring a little more of the garlic flavor and lemon should be the primary flavor of this aioli, but if you add too much lemon juice, there is no taking it back. So add some, taste, and add a little more until you have the taste you want. You should also add salt and pepper to taste.

You can take this basic aioli in many directions. You can add different spices to it like dill, rosemary, basil, or thyme. Fresh spices finely copped are best but you can use dried if that is all you have. There are lots of good recipes online for Tartar Sauce where you add chopped shallots, cornichons, and capers along with parsley and dill. Or you can add mustard or curry paste to it for interesting sauces. You might want to give your aioli a little time in the refrigerator to absorb the flavors of the spices or other additions that you have added.