

**Flavour of the month : jams & chutneys / Restaurant Associates.**

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# Flavour of the month

## jams & chutneys





With the abundance of late summer fruit and vegetables currently available, why not take a leaf from Grimod de la Reyniere's book and learn 'the art of fixing the seasons' by bottling your own 'Jams & Chutneys' - Restaurant Associates' Flavour of the Month for September!

#### **A history of preserving food**

Preserving techniques date back to the dawn of agriculture, about 10,000 years ago. These practises freed our ancestors from the oppression of the seasonal cycle, in which the abundance of spring and summer was followed by the more meagre fare of winter.

Food preserving greatly influenced the advancement of our societies, encouraging nomads to settle, enabling travellers to travel, and allowing people seasonal leisure. Drying, salting, pickling in vinegar, smoking, fermenting, making products from milk, using sugar, making concentrates, canning, freezing and dehydrating have all been utilised as methods of preserving over the course of centuries.

#### **Napoleonic wars... and jam**

"An army marches on its stomach," declared French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, as his legendary army wound its way through Europe two hundred years ago. Mid-eighteenth century marching conditions were brutal, long, cold hauls with little if any fresh food. Napoleon's armies were exhausted and breaking down both mentally and physically from a limited and inconsistent diet. Scurvy, malnutrition and starvation ran rampant through the troops.

Desperate to see his armies flourish, Napoleon offered the breathtaking sum of 12,000 francs to the first person to discover a new (and reliable) method for keeping France's armies fed.

One man, an expert confectioner, distiller, and chef, devoted himself to answering Napoleon's call. Finally in 1795, after fourteen years of experimentation, Nicolas Appert hit upon the first known method for canning. Placing food in glass jars sealed with wax and reinforced with wire, and then heating the jars, Appert was the first to successfully can meats, fruits, and vegetables.

The French Navy received a trial of Appert's first canned goods. They were an overwhelming success and quickly afforded top-secret military status. The benefits were transforming. Armies could now be fed far from home, sailors could take a journey's worth of food with them, and a healthier diet meant soldiers better equipped for fighting. Appert's sealed jars earned him Napoleon's 12,000 francs, the honour of his country, and a place in food preservation history.

But it wasn't long before the secret leaked. Other countries began working to 'invent' canned goods and in 1810 Peter Durand, an Englishman, patented a tin can packaging process. The tin cans were lighter, easier to seal, and could take more of a beating on long journeys than Appert's fragile glass bottles. Three years later Bryan Dorkin and John Hall, also of England, set up the first commercial canning factory and shortly thereafter canned foods were being sent to distant colonies. Yet for all its success, no one knew why canning worked. The world would have to wait another fifty years before the famous Louis Pasteur explained the growth of microorganisms as the cause of food spoilage.

#### **What to bottle?**

**JAMS & MARMALADES** - Jam is a cooked mixture of fruit or vegetables with sugar which is boiled and bottled. Marmalades are always made with a citrus fruit e.g. oranges, lemons, grapefruit, tangerine.

**PICKLES & CHUTNEYS** - Pickling utilises vinegar as the preserving agent, preserving larger recognisable pieces of fruit or vegetables whilst chutneys are made from finely chopped ingredients. Both pickles and chutneys can be sweet or sharp and are usually served with savoury foods such as cheese or cold meats.

**CONSERVES** - These are usually made with whole or large fruit pieces which is suspended in a thick syrup. The fruit is layered with equal quantities of sugar and left for 24 hours. It is then boiled for a much shorter length of time than jam which preserves the fruit closer to its original state, both in form and flavour.

#### **What to preserve now?**

**APPLES** - Worcester Pearmain, Bramleys, Discoveries, Early Windsors and Cox's Orange Pippins should all be making an appearance this month. Some of these are available in supermarkets, but searching out local growers and visiting orchards will give you an even wider choice.



**BLACKBERRIES** - Blackberries can be gathered as soon as they ripen from red berries into dark, plump berries and can be eaten fresh (they only keep for a short time) or preserved into excellent jelly or jam - although the latter can be a bit 'pippy'. They are also delicious in pies, crumbles, ice cream, fools and summer puddings. They are a natural partner for the first of the cooking apples. Blackberry and apple jam and crumble are popular recipes. Use Bramleys in pies and crumbles, or bake them whole with some brown sugar, butter and spices.

**DAMSONS & PLUMS** - Damsons are blue-black fruit which look like small plums. They can be eaten raw when ripe but there is as much stone as there is flesh. They are best cooked, which brings out their sweet, spicy flavour, and put into pies and crumbles, jams, jellies, ice cream, fools and sorbets. An old English recipe using damsons is damson cheese, which is a rich confection of fruit, potted and aged before eating. Many winemakers are eager to harvest the fruit for their home brew.

### **How to bottle your preserves**

**EQUIPMENT** - Preserving jars or bottles, a preserving pan (choose a heavy based one with slightly sloping sides to ensure good evaporation and avoid your jam boiling over), a ladle, slotted metal spoon, wooden spoon, measuring jug, sugar thermometer, nylon sieve (if you need to strain the mixture), a funnel, sealing discs, jar covers, and labels.

**STEP 1** - Sterilise your jars or bottles by covering with cold water, bringing to the boil and boiling for 15 minutes. Carefully remove and dry on a clean cloth or in a warm oven.

**STEP 2** - Follow your recipe to make your jam or chutney. Once setting point is reached, leave the hot preserve for 15 minutes. Pour into jars while they are still warm, this reduces the chances of the glass cracking, fill almost to the top. Cover immediately with waxed disc while preserve is still warm. Leave to go cold, then cover with damp cellophane and secure with an elastic band. If you seal the preserve while it is still warm, mould will grow on top. For long-term storage, cover with a screw lid as well. Label and store in a cool, dry place. Once opened, preserve should be stored in the fridge.

### **Sweet success**

The three essential elements in jam are pectin, acid and sugar. A successful preserve requires fruit with a certain level of pectin, which is a gum-like substance found in the pips, skin and flesh. However pectin will not gel properly without acid, which is also found in fruit. Under-ripe fruit contains higher levels of pectin and acid than ripe fruit so choose this wherever possible. Never make jam with over-ripe fruit.

Fruits with medium to high pectin and acid levels are ideal for simply jam making. These include apricots, blackberries, blackcurrants, cranberries, damsons, gooseberries, greengages, oranges, plums, raspberries, redcurrants, lemons and apples. Cherries, grapes, peaches, rhubarb and strawberries all have low pectin and acid counts.

Before any sugar is added, the fruit must be cooked in water to draw out the pectin. Soft fruits like raspberries and blackcurrants only require a short cooking time but harder fruits like apricots, gooseberries and plums need more softening. This preliminary cooking before the addition of sugar is crucial. If the sugar is added before the fruit is ready, the jam hardens rather than gels. After the addition of sugar, the mixture is boiled rapidly to drive off moisture and cause the pectin, acid and sugar to gel.

Granulated sugar is fine for most jam making, although preserving sugar will give a clearer finish, caster or muscovado sugar can also be used. (Muscovado sugar lends a distinctive flavour and darker colour.) Sugar with pectin or 'jam sugar' is granulated sugar with added pectin and citric acid, it is used for jams made with fruit that is low in pectin. Preserve made this way should reach setting point in just 4 minutes.

Jams are cooked when the 'setting point' is reached. It is important to test regularly for a set; if boiled for too long jam can darken and caramelise. There are various tests to determine setting point. Remove the pan from the heat while you are testing to prevent overcooking. The first method to test the temperature is using a sugar thermometer. If it registers 105 degrees C the preserve is ready. The second method is the chilled saucer test. For this, you will need one or two chilled saucers. Spoon a little mixture onto a cold saucer. Push a finger across the jam; if the surface wrinkles and it is beginning to set, it has reached setting point. If not, boil for another 5 minutes and repeat the test. The last method is the flake test. Using a wooden spoon, lift a little of the jam out of the pan. Let it cool slightly then tip the spoon so that the jam drops back into the pan. If the drip runs together and falls from the spoon in a flake rather than drips, it is ready.







## Recipe Suggestion

BY LISA BRUNT

PASTRY CHEF  
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### Raspberry Rhubarb Jam

#### Ingredients

750g raspberries  
750g rhubarb peeled and cut into 5 cm lengths  
150 ml water  
1500g granulated sugar  
15g butter

#### Method

1. Put raspberries, rhubarb and water into a pan.
2. Bring to the boil.
3. Simmer with a lid on for 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Crush fruit against the sides of the pan until soft and pulpy.
5. Add sugar and heat slowly, stirring all the time until the sugar has dissolved.
6. Bring to the boil. Boil briskly for about 10 to 15 minutes or until setting point has been reached.
7. Remove pan from the heat and add the butter.
8. Cool slightly and then ladle into the washed and sterilised jars. Seal.
9. Serve with scones or over hot sponge pudding for a tasty hot dessert.

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Competition ends 30th September 2006 and winners will be drawn at Head Office.

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