

# People First Preserving Sessions

## General Notes about Preserving

Preserving fruit and vegetables is an age-old tradition that enables us to enjoy produce year round that we've either grown ourselves, or that we have bought locally when it is in season. Naturally food rots over a period of time, so the purpose of preserving is to keep it nutritionally valuable and tasty for an extended period – particularly to enjoy at times of the year when there is a shortage of seasonal produce.

Food deteriorates due to enzymes within the food and bacteria, yeasts and fungi contaminating it from the outside. Preserving food basically means that you are making the conditions difficult (hopefully impossible) for spoilage to occur. Moisture, warmth and light enable these enzymes and microorganisms to grow.

What follows is a selection of recipes of preserving fruit and vegetables available in late summer and early autumn. These recipes use a variety of methods to preserve: adding sugar, salt or vinegar in the right quantities is basically a chemical preservation where microorganisms cannot develop but the food is still fit for human consumption; and heat processing, where the microorganisms are destroyed by heating to appropriate temperatures for sufficient times. There are other ways to preserve food which you will be aware of and can read about in books or online such as freezing, dehydrating and vacuum-packing.

When doing home preserving it is important that all containers are clean and sterile and any rubber sealing bands or screw band jar lids being used are new, or in the case of normal jar tops they are new. Before you go to use anything you have preserved at home, please check that it has been preserved properly: when jars are completely cold you should test the seal by depressing the top of a normal jar lid (it shouldn't pop up), or removing the clip or screw-band and lifting by the rubber seal carefully. If the lid remains attached a vacuum has formed and it is fine to store, otherwise you should reprocess immediately or store in the fridge and eat within a month.

### Further Reading:

Home Preservation of Fruit and Vegetables *Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food* HMSO (this is out of print, but worth getting hold of a second hand copy if you can)

How to Store Your Garden Produce *Piers Warren* Green Books

River Cottage Handbook No. 2 Preserves *Pam Corbin* Bloomsbury

Traditional Jams and Preserves *Eve Parker* Aura

Ham, Pickles and Jam *Thane Prince* Pavillion

Abundance *Alys Fowler* Kyle Books

These Preserving Sessions are being run by Vicki Leng [www.vickileng.co.uk](http://www.vickileng.co.uk)



## Jams!

Most jams rely on equal quantities of fruit to sugar, sometimes with added pectin (sometimes in the form of lemon juice) to help with setting. The method is nearly always the same: soften the fruit, add the sugar, bring to the boil until setting point is reached, jar and seal.

There is more pectin in fruit which is not overripe, so check your fruit carefully before deciding to make jam with it.

To test if setting point is reached you can:

1. Flake Test: dip a clean wooden spoon into the jam. Remove it and hold high above the pan and twirl to cool the jam. Let the jam fall off the spoon. If the drops run together and form 'flakes' that hang on to the spoon you have reached setting point.
2. Cold Saucer Test: Chill a plate in the fridge or freezer. Put a teaspoon of jam on the plate and let it cool for a minute. Push the surface of the jam; if it wrinkles you have reached setting point.
3. Thermometer Test: Stir the jam. Dip the thermometer into hot water, then into the jam. If it reaches 105C/220F then you should have reached setting point!

Worst case scenarios:

You don't reach setting point (or there wasn't enough pectin). You jar your jam and it remains very runny when cold. Either reboil the whole lot, or accept it for what it is!

You over cook the jam and it sets very quickly and very hard. You have a very stiff jam that might need heating in order to spread.

### Strawberry Jam

#### Ingredients

- 1 kg strawberries, hulled and wiped
- 1 kg granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

#### Method

1. Put the fruit in a large pan with the lemon juice and simmer gently until the juices start to run.
2. Mash the strawberries a little with a potato masher (or the back of a wooden spoon) and continue to simmer until you have a thick puree.
3. Remove from the heat. Add the sugar and stir until completely dissolved.
4. Put back on the heat and bring to the boil for about 5 minutes.
5. Remove any scum with a slotted spoon.
6. Test for setting point.
7. Pour into warm sterilised jars and seal with clean lids.
8. Label when cool.

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## Plum (or Damson) Jam

### Ingredients:

- 1 kg plums or damson
- 1 kg granulated sugar
- Up to 1.4 litres water (plums need less)

### Method

1. Wash the fruit and remove the stalks. If you have large fruit half or quarter (don't worry about the stones – they contain pectin and you can remove them as the jam cooks)
2. Place in a preserving pan with the water and simmer gently until soft. Press the fruit against the side of the pan to break open and remove the stones with a slotted spoon.
3. Remove from the heat and add the sugar and stir until dissolved completely.
4. Bring to the boil and cook rapidly for about 10 minutes or until the jam sets when tested. Remove any stones that you have missed! Scrape any scum off with a slotted spoon.
5. Pour into warm sterilised jars and seal.
6. Label when cool.

### Plain scones

All fruit jams are excellent with freshly made scones!

### Ingredients

- 225g self raising flour
- Pinch salt
- 55g butter
- 25g caster sugar
- 150ml milk

### Method

1. Heat the oven to 225C/Gas 7. Line or grease a baking sheet.
2. Mix together the flour and salt and rub in the butter.
3. Stir in the sugar.
4. Stir in the milk and work briefly until you have a soft dough (never overwork scones, it makes them rubbery).
5. Pat or roll out on a floured surface to 2cm thick.
6. Use a cutter or a knife to make into 8-12 scones.
7. Place on baking sheet, brush with more milk, bake for 12-15 minutes, until well risen and golden.
8. Allow to cool for a few minutes before slathering with freshly made jam!

## Sweet Chilli Jam

*(from Traditional Jams and Preserves, Eve Parker)*

### Ingredients

- 8 red peppers, deseeded and chopped
- 5 medium red chillies, chopped
- 5cm fresh ginger, peeled and chopped
- 8 garlic cloves, chopped
- 400g tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 750g caster sugar
- 250ml red wine vinegar

### Method

1. Put the peppers, chillies, ginger and garlic into a food processor and whizz until they are finely chopped.
2. Add this mixture to a preserving pan and add the tomatoes, sugar and vinegar. Bring to the boil.
3. Skim off any scum with a slotted spoon, and turn the heat down to a simmer.
4. Cook for about 50 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. After the jam has thickened, continue to cook for another 10-15 minutes, stirring frequently so that it doesn't stick to the bottom of the pan.
6. When it's a nice thick consistency, take off the heat, allow to cool a little, before pouring into hot sterilised jars.

Excellent with cold meats and cheeses!

## Ketchups and Sauces

Homemade ketchups are a bit time consuming to make, but they taste delicious and you know exactly what's in them. And, they are a great way to use up gluts of plums and tomatoes. If you like foraging, I recommend Hawberry Ketchup – you should be able to find a recipe online, or if not, find it in a Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall preserving book.

### Homemade Brown Sauce

*(from Ham, Pickles and Jam, Thane Prince)*

This is a lovely fruity, spicy brown sauce, and you should keep it for at least 2 months before you open to allow the vinegar to mellow and the spices to develop. A great sauce with a bacon sandwich, or with egg and chips, or omelettes, or indeed any kind of egg...

### Ingredients

- 1.8 kg/4lb plums
- 175g/6oz stoned dates, chopped
- 115g/4oz raisins
- 3 large onions, chopped
- 1 garlic bulb, peeled and chopped
- 2-3 fresh hot chillis OR 1 tsp dried chilli flakes (or both if you like it hot!)
- 55g/2oz fresh root ginger peeled and grated OR 1tbsp ground ginger
- 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 tbsp allspice berries
- 55g sea or rock salt
- 750ml/26floz cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp ground turmeric
- 280g/10oz soft brown sugar
- ½ nutmeg, grated

### Method

1. Wash and stone the plums.
2. Place the plums in a pan with the dates, raisins, onion, garlic, chillies, ginger, coriander, all spice, salt and 500ml/18floz of the vinegar.
3. Bring to the boil and simmer until the fruit is very soft – about 30 minutes
4. Liquidise and push through a nylon sieve into a clean pan.
5. Add the remaining vinegar and the sugar, turmeric and nutmeg.
6. Simmer until thick – about 20 minutes.
7. Pour into warm sterilised bottles, seal and label. It will keep for about 12 months in a cool dark place.

Makes about 6-8 medium jars (depending on thick you like your brown sauce!)

## Roast Tomato Ketchup

*(from Ham, Pickles and Jam, Thane Prince)*

### Ingredients

- 3kg very ripe tomatoes
- 8 large garlic cloves, peeled and roughly chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 500g onions, peeled and chopped
- 1 large red pepper, chopped
- 200g celery, trimmed and chopped
- 250ml cider vinegar
- 225g granulated sugar
- Tabasco sauce to taste (optional!)

### Spice Mix

- 12 cloves
- 15-20 allspice berries
- 1 teaspoon celery seeds
- 10cm cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 2 tablespoons salt

### Method

1. Preheat the oven to Gas 6/200C
2. Cut the tomatoes in half and place on a baking sheet. Scatter over the thyme, salt and garlic, and drizzle over the oil. Roast for 20-30 minutes.
3. Scrape the tomatoes and all their juices into a large preserving pan. Add the onion, pepper, celery and half the vinegar. Cook gently for about 15 minutes until all the ingredients are very soft.
4. Push the mixture through a nylon sieve.
5. Place all the whole spices into a coffee or spice grinder and whiz until finely ground (or use ground versions).
6. Return the tomato puree to the clean pan, add the sugar, remaining vinegar and the spice mix. Simmer for 15-20 minutes, stirring frequently until the mixture thickens. Watch out that the sauce doesn't catch on the bottom of the pan!
7. Remove from the heat, stir in some Tabasco if you like, then pour into sterilised hot jars or bottles and seal with clean vinegar proof lids.
8. Label when cool.

This ketchup will keep for 6 months or more in a cool, dark place, but it will lose its colour the longer you keep it.

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## Cordials and Syrups

Homemade fruit syrups are brilliant for staving off winter bugs (and they make you feel really smug!) as they are full of vitamin C (and sugar to give you winter energy!). Excellent with hot or cold water – about 6-8 parts water to syrup – or poured over vanilla ice cream or stirred into plain yoghurt.

### Spiced Blackberry Cordial

#### Ingredients

- 1 kg ripe blackberries
- 400ml water (or just enough to scantily cover the berries)
- ½ tsp cloves
- ½ tsp grated nutmeg
- 1 cinnamon stick
- Juice of half a lemon
- Approx. 400-500g sugar
- A dash of brandy (optional!)

#### Method

1. Place the berries in a pan with the water and the spices. Cover and bring to the boil.
2. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, until very soft.
3. Strain through a nylon sieve and add the lemon juice and sugar to taste, but about 500g per 600ml of juice.
4. Stir until the sugar has dissolved, heating gently if necessary.
5. Stir in the brandy if using, and pour into hot sterilised bottles or jars.
6. If you want to heat treat, just sit the jars or bottles on a tea towel or heat resistant plate inside a large saucepan and pour over water to half way up the jars. Cover and bring to the boil and cook for about 20 minutes.

Makes about a litre or 2 pints.

The brandy helps the cordial keep, so if you aren't using it, either heat treat the cordial, or keep it in the fridge, or check it regularly for signs of spoilage. It should keep for at least 6 weeks even without heat treating or brandy.

NOTE: if you are using elderberries, please bear in mind they stain really badly and any stained cotton/muslin cloths and aprons used to wipe up may need soaking in laundry bleach to get clean...

## Mixed Berry Syrup

### Ingredients

- 1 kg mixed berries (strawberries, raspberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, blackberries, elderberries...)
- Caster sugar

### Method

1. Heat the fruit in a saucepan, with water if you have a lot of blackcurrants/blackberries, and bring it quickly to the boil with constant stirring.
2. Boil for one minute, crushing any fruit with a wooden spoon.
3. Press the liquid through a nylon sieve or cheesecloth (the finer the material, the less fibrous the end result will be).
4. Measure the juice and add about  $\frac{3}{4}$  kg sugar to every litre. Obviously, do a taste check, but remember that while it seems a lot of sugar, you will only be having this in small quantities, and the sugar acts as a preservative.
5. Stir until all the sugar has dissolved and you have a syrup.
6. Pour into sterilised jars/bottles and when cool, keep in the fridge.
7. Once opened, consume within a fortnight.

## **Pickles**

Pickling food is an ancient practice, involving salt and/or vinegar, and all sorts of food stuffs can be pickled: meat and fish, as well as vegetables! Ideally pickled vegetables should be crunchy, so it's best not to keep them for many months as the longer they sit in the vinegar, the softer they become. One way to encourage crunchiness is to brine the vegetables first – ideally for a day or two, but even 30 minutes will make a difference.

### Crunchy Courgette Pickle

#### Ingredients

- 500g courgette, finely sliced
- 3 shallots, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons sea salt

#### For the pickling vinegar

- 500ml cider vinegar
- 140g golden caster sugar
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard powder
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon celery seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- $\frac{1}{2}$  dried chilli, crushed

## Method

1. Place the courgettes in a glass or ceramic bowl with the chopped shallots and sprinkle them with the salt. Cover with ice cold water and stir until the salt has completely dissolved. Leave for up to an hour if you can, then drain and dry with kitchen roll/clean tea towels.
2. Place all the ingredients for the pickling vinegar in a stainless steel saucepan and bring gently to a simmer, stirring until all the sugar has dissolved.
3. Remove the pan from the heat, and leave it until it is warm to the touch.
4. Add the courgette slices and shallots to the pan and stir until they are thoroughly coated in the vinegar.
5. Spoon the contents into warm sterilised jars and seal immediately with vinegar-proof lids.
6. Keep in the fridge. This is ready to eat within a week, and should ideally be eaten within two months.

## Ploughman's Pickle

### Ingredients

- 250g carrots, chopped
- 140g dried apricots, chopped
- 140g stoned prunes, chopped
- 2 courgettes, chopped
- 1 medium cauliflower, broken into small florets
- 10 garlic cloves, crushed
- 140g raisins
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped
- 225g muscovado sugar
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 60ml lemon juice
- 350ml cider vinegar
- 200ml malt vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper

### Method

1. Put all the ingredients into a large preserving pan and bring to the boil.
2. Reduce the heat and simmer for 1 ½-2 hours or until all the vegetables are al dente (don't overcook – they still need to be a bit crunchy!)
3. If the mixture is still quite runny, take a ladleful and mix it with 1 tablespoon of cornflour or arrowroot to make a paste and return this to the pan and cook for 5 more minutes until the mixture has thickened.
4. Cool slightly before pouring into warm sterilised jars and seal with vinegar-proof lids.

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# Chutneys

The best chutneys are the products of patience: they should be cooked for a long time and left for 3 months (or longer!) to mature. Never be tempted to eat them straightaway as the vinegar will overpower everything else. When you make chutneys, your choice of sugar and vinegar will affect the overall appearance and flavour of the finished product: granulated sugar and white vinegar will give you a very pale chutney, conversely, dark muscovado sugar and malt vinegar will give you a dark, rich chutney. Air tight seals are important, so ensure you have a vinegar-proof lid, and always store your chutneys in a cool dark place.

## Apple and Tomato Chutney

A classic which makes good use of two gluts!

### Ingredients

- 1kg cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped
- 1kg red tomatoes, chopped
- 450g onions, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
- 250g sultanas
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 teaspoons curry powder
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1.2 litres malt vinegar
- 450g demerara sugar

### Method

1. Add all of the ingredients, apart from the sugar and half the vinegar, to the pan. Bring to the boil and simmer until everything is soft.
2. Add the sugar and the remaining vinegar, and cook slowly, stirring until everything has dissolved.
3. Continue to cook until the chutney is smooth and thick. Pour into hot sterilised jars.
4. Label when cool.

## Beetroot Chutney

### Ingredients

- 1kg raw beetroot, peeled and chopped
- 450g onions, finely chopped
- 750g cooking apples, peeled, cored and finely chopped
- 3 oranges, zested and juiced
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 450g raisins
- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 1kg golden granulated sugar
- 1 litre red wine vinegar or malt vinegar

### Method

1. Place the prepared ingredients into a preserving and cook gently until the sugar has dissolved. Simmer for an hour, stirring frequently until the chutney is quite thick and the fruit and vegetables are tender.
2. Leave to settle for 10 minutes, then spoon into hot sterilised jars and seal immediately with vinegar-proof lids.

## Relishes

What's the difference between a relish and a ketchup and a chutney and a pickle? Texture mainly!

### Cucumber relish

*(Traditional Jams and Preserves, Eve Parker)*

#### Ingredients

- 900g cucumber, diced
- 900g green tomatoes, diced
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 1 green chilli, deseeded and finely sliced
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 600ml white wine vinegar
- 175g white sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 tablespoon pickling spice
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds

#### Method

1. Prepare the vegetables, layer them in a glass dish and sprinkle them with salt. Leave to stand for an hour (or overnight if you have time).
2. Tip them into a colander and drain well.
3. Put the vinegar, sugar and spices into a preserving pan and bring slowly to the boil, stirring all the time until the sugar has dissolved.
4. Bring to the boil.
5. Add the vegetables, reduce to a simmer, and cook, uncovered for 30 minutes, until the mixture is fairly thick, but still moist.
6. Ladle into hot sterilised jars, and seal with vinegar-proof lids.
7. Label when cool, leave for 4 weeks before eating.

## Sweet and Sour Tomato Relish

*(Traditional Jams and Preserves, Eve Parker)*

### Ingredients

- 4 large ripe tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 eating apple, peeled, cored and finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons tomato puree
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 red chilli, finely sliced
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Method

1. Heat the oil in a large pan and add the onion and apple and cook until the onion is just starting to brown. Add the garlic, and cook for another minute.
2. Add the tomatoes and cook on a high heat for 2 minutes, until the mixture has blended and softened.
3. Add the tomato puree, balsamic vinegar, sugar and chilli and mix thoroughly. Season with salt and pepper, remove from the heat.
4. Pour into hot sterilised jars and seal. Store in the fridge and eat within two months.