

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Wild beach plums in Ida's jam kitchen

Last year, during my first trip to Cape Cod, I was thrilled to discover cranberry bogs near a beach only a few blocks from my friend's house. In a series of small fields surrounded by little canals, the cranberry bushes were being covered in sand to protect the plants and stimulate growth. I was so fascinated that in addition to a camera full of pictures of bogs with and without sand, I brought back a suitcase filled with every locally-made cranberry confection I could find—my version of shopping local while away from home.

This year's trip was a month later than last year's, so the bogs were already hidden under their protective layer of sand. Research about local specialties led me to a new discovery—wild beach plums and the local kitchens that create jams and jellies with them. Because they were still in bloom, I couldn't pick any fruit from the wild plum bushes we saw in the dunes at East Sandwich Beach on Cape Cod Bay. Low to the ground, the bushes were covered in clusters of small white blossoms of varying stages. Despite the constant breeze, each cluster hosted a variety of pollinators lazily snacking in the strong sun. Ripe fruit ranges from a dark purple to a lighter golden red and are about the size of a large grape. The plums are considered a New England treasure and are made into jams and jellies by both home and commercial jam makers.

One of the more interesting jam kitchens, Green Briar, has been in continuous operation since 1903. Started as a tea house by self-taught jam maker Ida Putnam, Green Briar has been run by only 5 women during its 114 year history, employs local women and uses locally-grown fruit. Up a worn dirt driveway, the property also houses the Thornton W. Burgess Historical Society which honors the famous naturalist and author, known for creating animal characters like Grandfather Frog and Happy Jack Squirrel. Visitors can walk through a wildflower garden, browse Burgess's books, walk through the historic kitchen and participate in workshops on nature or jam-making.

Open to visitors even on jam-making days, the kitchen stands as it was in 1914, featuring a double-line of 20 burners. Up to ten jam makers can work at the same time turning out Ida's original recipes, plus a few new creations from a later manager, Martha Blake. The kitchen also boasts a solar-cooker which is used to make alcohol-accented sun-cooked jams. This "living museum" produces 20,000 jars of jams, jellies, marmalades, conserves and relishes each year. Since Ida had the foresight to start a mail order business during Green Briar's early years, I shopped local and shipped a few precious jars of Wild Beach Plum Jelly home. It tastes so good I just might order more online!

What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans**—green, yellow, purple, pole/bush
Beets—red
Cabbage—green
Carrots—orange, red
Corn
Cucumbers—slicers, kirby, armenian
Eggplant—small purple/white italian, purple/white/green asian, thai
Greens—arugula, collard, chard, sorrel, curly kale
Herbs—garlic chives, turmeric, flat leaf parsley, cilantro, dill, italian/thai/lemon basil, mint
Kohlrabi
Lettuce—green romaine, head, mix
Melon—watermelon, cantalope
Moringa
Mushroom—fresh/dried shiitakes
Okra
Onion—yellow, sweet, red, green/red scallions
Papaya
Peppers—red/green/yellow/orange sweet bell, poblano, jalapeño, shishito, italian frying, red cherry, anaheim
Pineapple
Potato—yellow-flesh, red, purple, russian banana
Squash—yellow/white/green pattypan, yellow crookneck, green/gold/bi-colored/italian zucchini, acorn, spaghetti, blue hubbard, kabocha
Tomatoes—plum, sun gold, cherry, grape, heirloom

PUTTING FOOD BY

As the summer heat builds, the more delicate crops like lettuces and peas give way to harder veggies like eggplant and okra.

While hoop houses and hydroponics allow us to have tomatoes year-round, our hot summers encourage a plethora of peppers, both sweet and hot! Take advantage of the bounty to put by some tomato sauces and tomato-pepper salsas for chilly winter dinners—a little summer spiciness will warm up even the coldest diner!

Local and Fresh— Heirloom Tomatoes

Grown from seeds passed down through generations, heirloom tomatoes are popular for their variety of colors and tastes. You've seen them—brownish Black Krimms, tiny Yellow Pears and distinctive Cherokee Purples. Treat like any tomato—and remember, never ever refrigerate!

Baked Tomatoes Three Ways

INGREDIENTS

4 tomatoes, cut in half horizontally
Desired topping

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Top tomato halves with desired topping.

Bake tomatoes 30-45 minutes, until cooked through.

Serve hot or at room temperature.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Simple Oil and Herb Topping

2 Tablespoons olive oil

1 Tablespoon dried basil, oregano or thyme

Dip each tomato half in olive oil and sprinkle with herb.

Cheesy Crumb Topping

2 Tablespoons olive oil

1/4 cup finely grated parmesan

1/2 cup panko

Dip each tomato half in olive oil. Mix parmesan and panko. Dip halves in mixture.

Tomato Pie Topping

1/4 cup mayonnaise

1/2 cup finely shredded cheddar

1 green onion, finely chopped

Mix all topping ingredients. Place 1 Tablespoon of mixture on each half. Press flat.



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TB's Lemon Artichoke Shrimp

INGREDIENTS

8 Tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup onions and shallots, finely diced
1/3 cup flour
1 1/3 cups white wine
2/3 cup fresh lemon juice
1 cup oven dried tomatoes, julienned
2 cups artichoke hearts, chopped (if using marinated artichokes, drain well before chopping)
1/2-1 cup vegetable broth
1 1/2 pounds shrimp, peeled

DIRECTIONS

In a large skillet, melt butter and stir in onions and shallots. Cook until translucent. Stir in flour and when mixed in, add white wine and lemon juice. Simmer until thickened. Add tomatoes, artichoke hearts and broth to create sauce of desired consistency. Add peeled shrimp, stir in and cook until opaque. Serve hot over rice or pasta. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

VARIATION

Make sauce without broth or shrimp. Pour over raw fish fillets, top with bread crumbs and parmesan. Bake in 350 degree oven for 30 minutes, until fish is done.

Tomato Pattypan Salad

INGREDIENTS

4 medium-sized tomatoes, variety of colors
8 very small pattypan squash
1 Tablespoon lemon zest, julienned
1/4 cup each olive oil, lemon juice, apple cider vinegar and honey
1 teaspoon dried thyme or 2 teaspoons fresh thyme
Dash each salt and pepper

DIRECTIONS

Cut tomatoes in half horizontally and then cut each half into 4 quarters. Set aside in a colander to drain.

Cut pattypan squash into quarters, about the same size as tomato pieces. Steam squash until just tender. Set aside to cool.

Combine remaining ingredients to create dressing and stir well.

Placed drained tomatoes and steamed squash in serving bowl. Coat with dressing and let marinate at room temperature for an hour before serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Oven-dried Tomatoes

INGREDIENTS

15-20 tomatoes, all about the same size
Olive oil (optional)
Salt (optional)
Pepper (optional)
Sugar (optional)
Herbs (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Cut tomatoes into quarters lengthwise.

Place each quarter skin-side down on a parchment-covered baking sheet. Add oil or seasonings, if desired.

Baking options:
400 degrees
for 45 minutes
creates a smoky final product good for sauces and recipes.

350 degrees
for 1-2 hours results in a nicely dried tomato, perfect for use in recipes and for refrigerator storage.

200 degrees
for 6-10 hours completely dries out the tomatoes for long-term storage.

I stuff dried tomatoes into jars and fill the jars with olive oil. I store the filled jars in the refrigerator.



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Tricks and Tips

When I was growing up, cornstarch wasn't something we used often, but since I have been working hard to learn the ways of a gluten-free kitchen, my box of organic corn starch has been replaced frequently.

Keep it sealed well and away from moisture.

Use to dust foods before frying in place of flour for a crispy crust.

Always add cornstarch to a cold liquid and stir until completely lump-free before adding to hot dishes. It will thicken as well as flour, but when reheating, be sure to stir often to recreate a smooth-textured finished product or sauce.

Blueberry Pudding

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1/3 cup maple syrup
- 1/3 cup cornstarch
- 2 cups milk (full fat milk makes the best final product)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 Tablespoon butter

DIRECTIONS

In a heavy saucepan combine blueberries and maple syrup over medium heat. Crush berries with a potato masher or the back of a spoon. Stir until mixture is actively simmering and very juicy.

Using a fork or whisk, mix cornstarch into milk and stir until completely combined.

Pour milk mixture into simmering blueberries. Add salt and cook until thickened, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat and add vanilla and butter. Stir until butter is completely melted.

Pour hot mixture into individual pudding cups, serving dishes or small mason jars.

Place in refrigerator to cool, but do not cover until completely chilled to avoid condensation accumulating on top of pudding.

Serve cold with additional blueberries or whipped cream as desired.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Be sure to eat pudding within a week.