

In focus – Preserves

JAM, CHUTNEY *and spreads*



It's easy – and fun – to make your own preserves. No special equipment is required – just observe hygiene and storage guidelines and you can enjoy your delicacies all year round.

Fruit for jam should be freshly picked and slightly under-ripe so that it is high in pectin, a carbohydrate that acts as a setting agent. For the best results, make small batches as the shorter cooking time gives better flavour, texture and appearance.

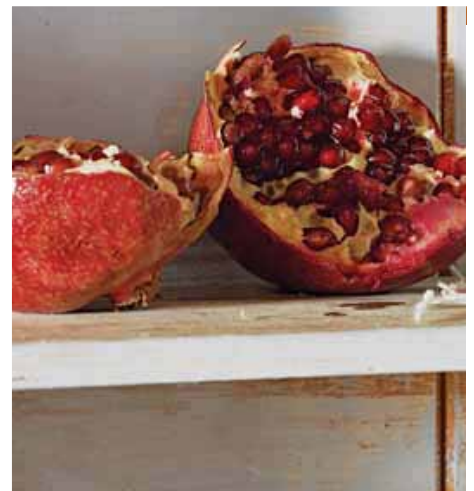
Let your imagination run wild with concoctions of pomegranate, cherries, berries, passionfruit, apricots and plums. If you're a romantic at heart, why not surprise your loved ones with rose petal jam?

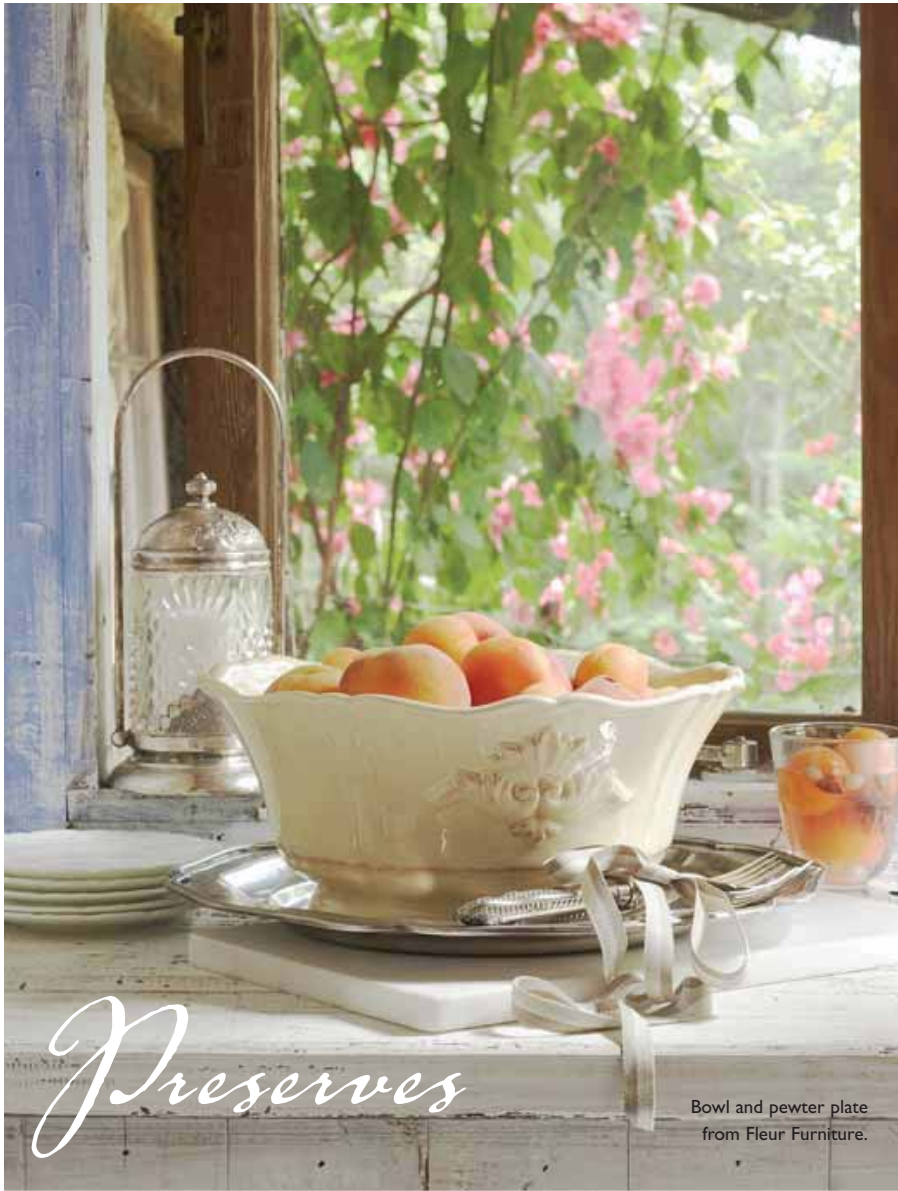
Always ensure the fruit is in good condition and the jars are not chipped, then sterilise them in hot water to prevent deterioration. Pour the jam right to the top of a hot jar as the mixture shrinks on cooling. When it's cold, seal the jar and label it with the contents and the date, storing it in a cool, dry place away from the light.

Tangy chutney is the perfect accompaniment for curries, cheese, chicken dishes, hot and cold meats and savoury snacks. All varieties are based on chopped fruit or vegies, sugar and vinegar, and simple to cook. Our favourites include beetroot, plums, apricots, pears, sultanas, mangos, apples, dates and cherries. Chutney is a great way to use up fruit that's left over or misshapen – and don't forget the delights of homemade mustard. Go as spicy as you dare! Mint jelly is ideal for lamb dishes, and who could beat a lovely homemade cranberry sauce with turkey in the festive season?

If you're short of time, vanilla sugar takes only five minutes, using one vanilla pod to flavour a kilo of sugar – it's such a treat in fruit salad.

We made a delightfully tangy lemon and passionfruit jam – the exotic taste is perfect for spreading on toast or filling cakes and tarts. Of course, old favourites like berry jams are great on warm bread or served with piping-hot scones or croissants, and frozen berries can be used at a pinch if fresh ones aren't available.





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Bowl and pewter plate from Fleur Furniture.



Bowl and plate from Fleur Furniture.

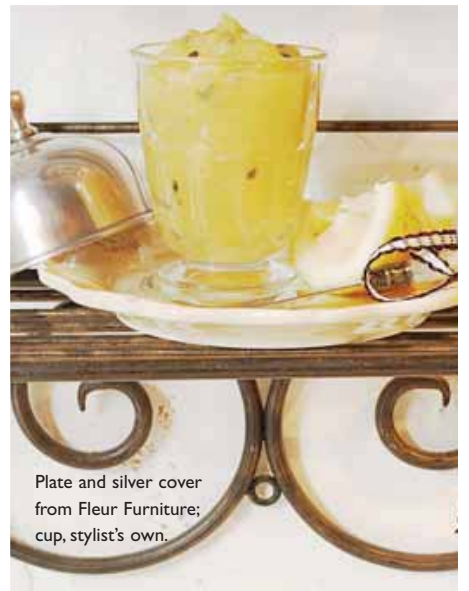


Plate and silver cover from Fleur Furniture; cup, stylist's own.



Presentation is all-important when it comes to preserves and – best of all – it's fun.

Jams are great for gifts, thank-yous and fetes. Go to the extra effort of adding ribbons from haberdashery shops and perhaps attach a small serving spoon. Decorative bottles are great – try stencilling a design on the jar, or paint one with glass paints. For a touch of whimsy, stick on cut-outs representing the fruit inside, such as small strawberries for strawberry jam.

If you're a fan of the traditional country look, cover the lids with scraps of checked fabric that have lace sewn around the edge. Artistic types will love designing pictures and printing them on sticky labels – you could even scan photos of the recipient to print out and attach. And don't limit yourself to white tags – coordinate coloured ones with the ingredients inside. For a truly opulent touch, however, we recommend the addition of a small tassel. n