



Preserving the Season

Grapes and figs are big time in our garden this year. The poor old fig tree is leaning on the ground to support its fruit and the grapevine is festooned. Last year it was peaches; big preserving pans full, bubbling on the stove and bottles and bottles of peaches, different flavours, stashed in the storeroom. Bags given to neighbours and buckets to friends from those peach trees - peaches everywhere! I've taken some to grow in town.

Unfortunately, I've gaily given away too many bottles and am now running out.



My favourite family dessert is puffed spelt, preserved fruit, cream and honey. By preserves I mean whatever is spilling out of gardens, I boil it up and bottle it hot, rather than carefully peel and slice and preserve in sugar. No sugar but sometimes honey. Peaches, plums, pears and figs.

Figs are ok in the mix, but I can't imagine them done alone as they're kind of slimy. Traditionally they're dried, but that takes eight hours and seems a waste of energy, so this year there are lots to share around. Jam, for us, has too much sugar and we don't eat it, perhaps a spicy sauce would be nice.

Grapes are impossible to preserve and the only way to use them is to make wine. In his retirement, my father made wine from natural ingredients. He would go around the orchards in the Bay of Plenty and buy or beg the seconds off the orchardists. He went through stages of making all types of wine. He found feijoa wine to be the strongest and would use it as a catalyst or starter for others.



After years of experimenting he came back to grapes, and for all his years of study and interest, work and dedication, he only made a few batches of really good wine. So, I'll be giving lots of grapes away as I don't think the birds will eat them all, they're being well fed by the birdfeeders which my darling partner keeps filling up.

Nectarines, apricots, cherries and avocados, it is the season to eat fruit. Cucumbers were also in abundance and I was bored with vinegar so I made a new recipe, although to be exact, this was made with an overgrown gherkin.

I take the fruit and cut it lengthwise into quarters, chop it into chunks approximately a centimetre or less. Peel a lemon with a potato peeler and slice the peel. Chop up a bunch of spring onions into little rounds and toss it all in a bowl with lemon juice and coarsely ground sea salt - Yum!



A quick easy side dish can be made with tomatoes. As your gardens are producing this delicious, nutritious fruit, slice it fresh and grind sea salt on every few layers as you load it into a bowl, leave for a while and it is delicious. Don't put this in the fridge as it hardens the taste and reduces the food value, but keep it out of the sun.

My partner always asks 'where's the basil?', but why not enjoy this beautiful fruit as it is; magnificent!



Fiona Sullivan

