Simple Cooking

Four Dollars — SEVENTY-SIX — Electronic Edition

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Maximum Marmalade

For a book on the history of marmalade, I am seeking information on how marmalade has developed in former British and other European colonies since it was first taken there.
— C. Anne Wilson

When this query appeared in *Petits Propos Culinaires* back in 1984, I had just acquired my first computer, a Systel II. I could afford to buy it because it was designed to use an electric typewriter (which I already owned) as both its keyboard and its printer. There were certain drawbacks to this arrangement, one of which I discovered the first time I used it to print out the text of Simple Cooking. The typewriter had never before been subject to such relentless use, since no mere human could type so fast for so long. Its anguished clatter reverberated down the legs of the typing table to pound a loud tattoo on the floor. My landlord lived directly beneath me, and after a half an hour of this he went storming out of the house, slamming the door behind him. I didn't know which to

expect first, the self-destruction of the typewriter or the arrival of an eviction notice.

However, the Systel II was ideal for tasks like copying out a bunch of marmalade recipes from my old American cookbooks, because with it they could easily be proofed, reorganized, and annotated without the mind-numbing tediousness of endless retyping. And, as it happened, I uncovered some truly odd variants, including one marmalade made from green tomatoes and pickled limes, another from rhubarb and figs, and another still from "oring roots," an ingredient Wilson would later identify not as orange tree roots (as I had wildly surmised) but as eringo, "a well-known aphrodisiac of Tudor and Stuart times."*

As far as I was concerned, all this effort—I eventually sent off a couple dozen recipes—had nothing to do with cooking and everything to do with getting a pat on the head from a culinary historian whose FOOD AND DRINK IN BRITAIN had greatly impressed me. I was fond of marmalade, it is true, but I was even fonder of marmalade's mystique. My grandmother's kitchen shelves were filled with stoneware crocks, both large and small, in which James Keiller & Son's Dundee Marmalade was then sold. These possessed a majestic solidity that not only made them impossible to discard but suggested a fierce loyalty to secret receipts, uncompromising standards, and eccentric production methods. Marmalade wasn't something you *made*; it was something you went to a fancy grocer in Boston to *select*.

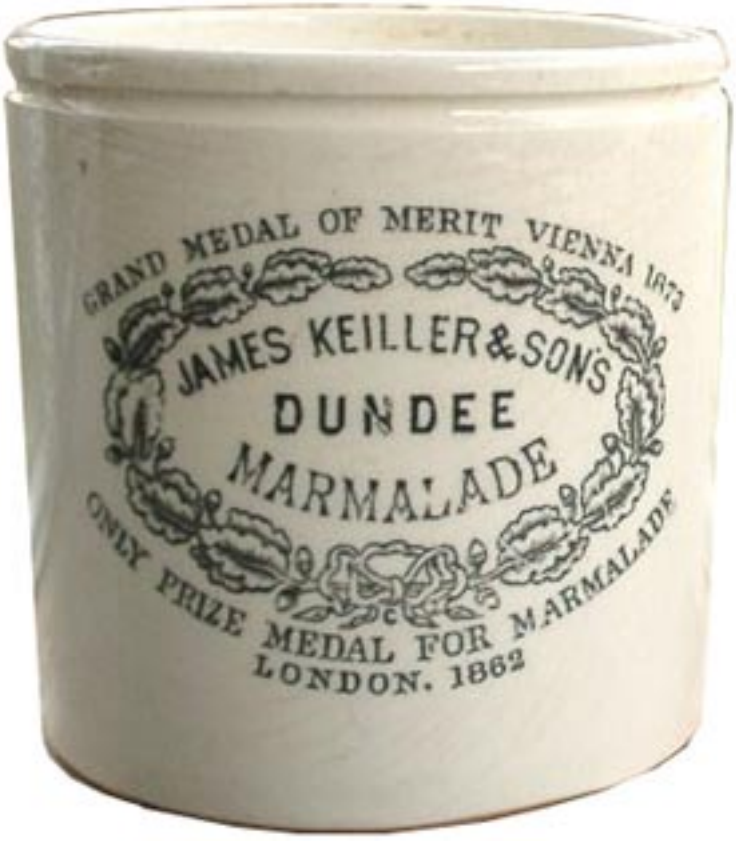
And what a choice there was. It ranged from the relatively ordinary—Chivers Olde English, Robertson's Golden Shred, the above-mentioned James Keiller & Son's Dundee—to the increasingly singular, such as Frank Cooper's Coarse Cut Vintage Oxford or Wilkin & Sons' Tiptree Tawney Seville. Still, no matter how they sliced it—coarse cut, thin cut, chip cut, silver shred—or how long they aged it, every serious British producer agreed on one fundamental rule: to be authentic, it must be made with the impossible-to-find-in-America, famously bitter Seville orange. As the British food historian, writer, and rather prodigious marmalade maker Alan Davidson states unequivocally in THE OXFORD COMPANION TO FOOD:

> Only bitter oranges can be used to make proper marmalade, which depends not only on their bitterness but also on the aromatic rind, which is quite different from that of the sweet orange.

Although this sentence appeared in print decades after the time about which I write, the unspoken sentiment, like some irrefutable first cause, cast a disheartening pall over the idea of making marmalade—real orange marmalade—in these United States. "No Seville oranges, dear chap? Don't waste your time."

The worst of the thing is that there's more than a little truth to this. It lies in that phrase "proper marmalade," which can roughly be translated as "marmalade as we Brits know and love it." Once you've tasted the stuff, you don't forget it, especially if you're susceptible to its dour charm. It is, after all, the only fruit preserve with an attitude problem. Where the others are all lambs, this one is a lion. Ordinarily, sugar works as a calmative, soothing everything into unctuous fruitiness. With marmalade, it plays the lion tamer, which with whip and chair just manages to keep its bitterness at bay.

*The original source of this recipe may be a famous marmalade concocted for Mary, Queen of England (1553 to 1558), and given to her as a New Year's present, as she wanted desperately to conceive a child. Fortunately for England—her reign was a disaster—she died instead, allowing Elizabeth I assumed the throne.



Traditional marmalade makers have gotten so good at maintaining this fine edge of control that they have gradually learned how to persuade the Seville orange to balance itself on beach balls and jump through flaming hoops. Read, for instance, this description of how Wilkin & Sons Tiptree Tawney Seville is made:

> This rich dark marmalade is made from Seville oranges that are cooked with sugar and nothing else. The dark colour and spicy flavour come from oranges that have been cooked whole, then cooked with sugar, left to cool overnight and cooked a third time to caramelise the sugar—a quite unique product that is well worth the extra effort in the making.

"Unique," for once, seems almost an understatement.

There have been many efforts to put a finger on what distinguishes marmalade from other preserves—it is made only from citrus fruits, it contains chunks of peel, it has no added pectin—but what makes it special is its potent mixture of the noble and the uncouth. It is, in other words, the Rob Roy of fruit jams—an analogy that is all the more apt when one learns that it was the Scots who first ate marmalade for breakfast...and what it was that marmalade replaced.

> [At breakfast] there is always, besides butter and toasted bread, honey and jelly of...preserved orange peel.
>
> —Bishop Pococke, Tours of Scotland (1760)

It was the Scottish habit, well into the eighteenth century, to start the day with a neat dram of Scotch whisky. It warmed the body (which was more than the smoldering chunks of peat in the fireplace could do), provided the system with a salutory slap, and boosted the spirits sufficiently to face another gray and drizzling day. And, whatever you might think of the habit, to try it once is to know that it is far from hedonistic—but rather on a par with a cold bath or a dose of cod-liver oil. And this analeptic aspect was underscored still further when the whisky had been transformed, as it often was, into a tonic by the addition of medicinal herbs and spices, following a formula in which bitter-orange peel usually played an important role.

After the dram came breakfast itself, which for most Scots was one or another variation of oatmeal mush, either poured into a bowl or fried into a cake and eaten with butter and cream. Those who could afford to might also eat some smoked fish or a slice cut from a mutton ham or a singed sheep's head. The very wealthy had all of the above. Everything was washed down with buttermilk or—more popularly among the menfolk—a jug of ale.

However, at just this time the rising popularity in tea drinking touched off a sea change in Scottish breakfast habits. Tea by itself might never have been able to bring this about, but its adoption coincided with a drop in the price of sugar. Who wanted hot mush and ale when with the teapot, creamer, and sugar bowl came barley bannocks, wheaten scones, oatcakes, and toast, served with preserves made of black currents, raspberries, and strawberries, along with the now ever-present bitter-orange marmalade?

The morning dram proved not nearly so easy to abandon as the ale. Dr. Johnson encountered both the dram and the newfangled Scottish breakfast during his tour of Scotland and the Hebrides and made a point of mentioning the universality (among males) of the former, even as he waxed poetic about the latter.

> A man of the Hebrides, for of the women's diet I can give no account, as soon as he appears in the morning, swallows a glass of whisky; yet they are not a drunken race, at least I never was present at much intemperance; but no man is so abstemious as to refuse the morning dram, which they call a *skalk*....
>
> Not long after the dram, may be expected the breakfast, a meal in which the Scots, whether of the lowlands or mountains, must be confessed to excel us. The tea and coffee are accompanied not only with butter but with honey, conserves, and marmalades. If an epicure could remove by a wish, in quest of sensual gratifications, wherever he had supped he would breakfast in Scotland.

Still, the ritual of the skalk was doomed to fall from the favor of all but rural diehards. Caffeine and alcohol are uneasy companions, especially in the morning, because they propel the drinker in contrary directions. Alcohol prepares you to face hard physical work in the cold outside; a dose of tea or coffee, the rigors of indoor occupations where intellectual alertness is the primary concern. The morning snort, whatever its analeptic benefits, aided not a whit in this.

To the Scot who cherished not the alcohol itself but the austere cathartic it embodied, the disappearance of the dram threatened to reduce the breakfast table to nothing more than a simpering synecdoche of self-indulgence. Casting about for something—anything!—among all this feminine frippery that might offer an echo of that manly physic, he found it in the pot of marmalade. There, in profuse quantity, was the same bitterly astringent peel that had for centuries been prescribed to revivify the heart, calm the stomach, and cure rheums, coughs, and colds.*

This link between marmalade and the virile tonic that preceded it† is possibly the reason why the former managed to sustain its refractory nature over the centuries: it was abetted by a substantial constituency who possessed the same qualities themselves. To put it another way, marmalade, at least the tough-love variety, is preeminently a *guy* thing, and not only in terms of consumption. As Alan Davidson notes in the same entry from which I quoted above:

> A minor but interesting facet of this British attainment is that, among all the numerous culinary operations carried out in British kitchens, marmalade-making is one which is quite often performed by men.

I was a pipe smoker during the same period I was developing my taste for this sort of marmalade. Both of these are hallmark pursuits of the English male, and it was impossible not to notice the uncanny resemblance of the language of the English marmalade maker to that of the English tobacconist. Not only do they share such terms as "coarse cut," "fine shred," "vintage," "tawny," and the like—to the point where in some instances it is hard to tell by name alone which is which (MacBaren's Golden Ambrosia, Stute's Thick Cut, Thomas Radford's Old Scotch)—but both emphasize the rough-and-tumble physicality so appealing to the masculine temperament.

Since the pipe smoker can be sent out of the house or at least into the study when he craves this kind of pleasure, pipe tobacco has it all over marmalade when it comes to macho noxiousness. However, the comparison prompts us to shove aside the genteel, even aristocratic, pretension with which British firms wrap their products. The truth is that any touch of genuine nobility about marmalade comes not from the English kings and queens who have lent it their patent but from the Scottish laird who sought out a decoction to break his fast that was as rebarbative as himself.

> The imported English and Scottish marmalades also have a role, often as a small food-gift. Although these marmalades are widely purchased, they tend not to go into everyday use, but to sit for long periods on the refrigerator shelf before a suitable occasion can be found to broach them. It is probably true to say that interest in Seville orange marmalade [in America]...is now at a low ebb.
> —C. Anne Wilson, The Book of Marmalade

WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT is how a foodstuff can come to resonate with a meaning that words can only approximately capture and certainly never hope to define.

*According to Sir Thomas Elyot in The Castel of Helth (1574), "The rinds [of the Seville orange] taken in a little quantity, do comfort the stomach, where it digesteth, specially condite [candied] with sugar, and taken fasting in a small quantity." According to C. Anne Wilson, this popular dietary lore helped shift marmalade from an ordinary sweetmeat to a morning "break-fast."

†In 1952, initiating one of those peculiar reversals which make culinary history so fascinating, Baxters began producing a Scotch-flavored marmalade that had been matured in Speyside whisky casks for five years—resulting in a product that was so successful that other manufacturers swiftly followed suit. Today, at least in Britain, it is possible to purchase marmalades flavored with *single malts*—such as English Provender Laphroaig Whisky Marmalade. Thus, where once the peel of bitter orange was added to the whisky, now the whisky is added to the conserve of bitter peel. The difference, of course, is in the self-conscious referentiality of the latter—Scottishness squared. Marmalade purists are not best pleased by this meddling with tradition, but, even so, it does possess a certain perverse historical resonance that even they must appreciate. And it tastes good, too.

Other citrus marmalades—lime, grapefruit, lemon—however delicious, however bitter, however similarly produced—will never have the same plangency for those able to pick up the wavelength of the original.

The British are dubious, I suspect, that most Americans possess the equipment to detect it, and mostly, I think, they are right. American men aren't entirely indifferent to the hairy Harris tweed model of masculinity, but they don't pursue it to anything like the same lengths. I certainly know guys who are aggressive marmalade fanatics. But they are more the exception than the rule, and I don't think that even they know of the existence of such ultra-puissant versions as Tiptree Tawney Seville.

If you don't pick up on that resonance, bitter-orange marmalade becomes just another choice on the upscale market's preserve shelf. And to the extent that we *have* become indifferent to it, it isn't because we fail to appreciate its special qualities but because those qualities have become less special. With fruit-laden, high-end American products like Stonewall Kitchen's Gooseberry Preserve and Black Raspberry Jam, American Spoonfood's Sour Cherry and Wild Thimbleberry Preserves, Clearbrook Farm's Oregon Boysenberry and California Peach Preserves to choose from, who's going to reach for the dusty jar of British marmalade? Genuine enthusiasts, without doubt, but apparently not me. Because, without my really noticing it, once preserves like these entered my life, my interest in buying and eating marmalade quietly faded away.

Even so, I continued to *think* about it…and that brings me back to C. Anne Wilson's query and my immersion in that horde of old American cookbooks. If you have made marmalade before, you will be generally familiar with the process. For orange marmalade, you are essentially directed to clean and cut up the fruit, cover it generously—sometimes very generously—with water, and boil it for about half an hour. Then you add sugar and cook the mixture down until it sets. However, I soon noticed that recipes written before the Depression often directed that the marmalade be made *without adding any water at all.*

If I had been paying more attention—after all, I wasn't thinking of following any of these recipes—I would have noticed that, prepared as directed, these marmalades would have been too thick to spread. And, in fact, this is the way the preserve was made before commercial producers discovered that adding water greatly reduced the amount of fruit required, while the resulting "spreadability" persuaded the public to buy it regardless. (Previously, if softening was required, it was done at the table—perchance as Margaret Dods suggested in The Cook & Housewife's Manual (1828)—by liquifying the paste "*ex tempore* with a little tea.")

This misreading, though, was a fortunate thing, because what came to me in a flash was that there was no reason except economy in contemporary recipes for that liquid to be *water*. Economy, of course, is a potent persuader, especially in hard times. But these days it shouldn't cost all that much more to replace the water with the fruit's own juice. Wouldn't that produce a marmalade as equally fruit-intensive as any carriage-trade preserve?

What got me to finally put this notion to the test was the introduction several years later of half-gallon cartons of not-from-concentrate orange and grapefruit juice. It embarrasses me to think that the reason I procrastinated was a reluctance to squeeze the juice from all that additional fruit…but the evidence certainly could be read that way. In any case, I began my experimenting by replacing the water in a standard grapefruit marmalade recipe with not-from-concentrate ruby red grapefruit juice.

The thick, tawny-colored result was noticeably different from ordinary grapefruit marmalade in its density of flavor and the tightness of balance between bitter and sour and sweet. Instead of the usual sourball puckerishness, that edge of medicinal bitterness gave the marmalade a three-dimensional quality that lifted it to a new level. It was, in the complicated response it demanded, a very adult preserve.

The name I gave to the outcome of this method was *maximum marmalade*, and that this was no exaggeration became all the more evident when Matt and I repeated the experiment with organic lemons. There, the result was so mouth-fillingly intense that it was almost masochistic. It was impossible to be sure whether the yelp from my taste buds was one of pleasure or panic. It wasn't a matter of the marmalade being too bitter, too sour, or too sweet, but too much of all three at once. However, the most that this demanded of the

preserve maker was some effort to control and shape the results. When we tackled key limes soon afterwards, we got it exactly right.

Even when the fruit wasn't especially sour, the intensification of flavor brought the marmalade to life. The one we prepared from Florida navel oranges, which would otherwise have been pathetically sweet and bland, proved instead to be innocently refreshing—a maximum marmalade that, for once, children could love. And a small step up in acidity and brightness of flavor meant that a marmalade we made from Temple oranges was revelatory in its easy accessibility combined with a wealth of citrusy flavor notes. Kids would love this one too, if grown-ups let them anywhere near it.

By then, I thought I had this marmalade business in the bag, but there was one final twist to the story still to come. Our pal and subscriber Ed Ivy has corresponded with us over the years. At one point we learned that he owned some land in Florida with wild orange trees growing on it and begged him to send us some of the fruit.

These trees are a source of entertainment for native Floridians. Tourists, seeing a citrus bonanza for the taking, often pull their cars over to the side of the road and pick armfuls of the wild oranges before they think to bite into one, only to discover that they are as sour as lemons. All sweet oranges in Florida grow on trees grafted to sour orange rootstock—which often takes over the whole tree once an orchard is abandoned. Pick a wild orange and chances are the fruit will be inedible, at least for eating out of hand.

The likelihood that these same trees will be bearing genuine Seville oranges is, of course, rather negligible. That fruit is also a cultivated variety, selectively bred for the perfume of its peel. In fact, Seville oranges were once widely grown in Florida, and—as we shall see—some are still. But even if all you can get hold of are the wild native sort, they are close enough kin to the Seville to make excellent British-style marmalade…as we were about to discover for ourselves.

When Ed's shipment arrived and we cut open the box, what met our eyes was as motley a crew as can be imagined. As with most wild fruit, there was clear visual evidence of a lack of pampering. The color of the peel was dull and dingy; its texture was as rough and blotchy as the back of a toad. A casual glance was also enough to know that they would not be bursting with juice. But a fingernail pressed into the peel released a pungent citrus aroma with hints of tangerine (something also present in its deeply bitter taste). We opened our copy of Jane Grigson's Fruit Book to the recipe for whole orange marmalade ("the simplest, easiest, and best flavoured") and set to work.

Again, however, I adapted the recipe, replacing the water called for with orange juice, and not that squeezed from the remaining sour oranges but from sweet Florida juice oranges. Although the former had it all over the latter when it came to potency, to citric punch, the sweet orange won hands down in terms of brightness and clarity of flavor. Maybe it was time for the two of them to get together and pool their resources, instead of duking it out for the title of Marmalade King.

The result, after all the soaking, cutting, and boiling, was, to put it simply, the best orange marmalade I've ever eaten in my life. And I wasn't the only one who thought this—we gave some of our very limited supply to marmalade fiends of our acquaintance who said exactly the same thing. Who begged us for more. This is because the stuff brought you back to the first time your taste buds encountered real British marmalade and shouted, "Wow!" And here they were, shouting it all over again.

This, in short, was a marmalade to make a Scotsman sit up and take notice…and, for an American marmalade maker, if that isn't a triumph, I don't know what is.◆

three important notes about marmalade making

Choosing the fruit. Select fruit that has smooth, firm skin and feels heavy for its size. Smaller fruits generally have more flavor than their larger siblings. Organic citrus is best (no pesticide residues); don't be put off if the peel has greenish patches—outside color is no indicator of inside flavor.

Boiling the peel. Marmalade recipes universally direct you to boil the peel

to soften it. Don't worry if the result seems mushy—once you cook the peel with sugar to make the marmalade, it will become resilient and chewy again. The only citrus fruit I've encountered that didn't require pre-boiling is the Meyer lemon. Otherwise, if you like your peel chewy, boil it less; if you like it soft, boil it more. Here, experience will prove the best guide.

Batch Size. The recipes that follow—apart from the first of them (which dealt with our box load of sour oranges)—are for small, sometimes very small, batches of marmalade. These not only are easier on the cook but make the best marmalade, since longer cooking emphasizes the taste of the increasingly caramelized sugar over that of the fruit. This approach makes even more sense when—as it is for us—preserve making is not a way of dealing with a bumper crop but motivated by, say, the appearance of little bags of key limes at the supermarket. If you decide to make more marmalade than you can conveniently store in your refrigerator, you should seek out and follow the instructions in any contemporary preserving manual for giving the sealed jars a final water bath before storing them away on a closet shelf.

Seville Orange

Maximum Orange Marmalade

Based on a recipe from Jane Grigson's Fruit Book

This is the recipe we developed using wild Florida sour oranges, with which we had great success. We haven't made it with "real" Seville oranges, but I don't doubt that the results may be even more exciting using them. However, we did try making it with ordinary Florida juice oranges, with surprisingly good results—especially if the juice proves to be tangy and full of orange flavor (look for Pineapple or Valencia juice oranges—see the sidebar on the following page). If you go this route, use the same oranges to produce the extra juice, and be sure to let the result age a few weeks before sampling. We were surprised at the difference that made.

[makes about 4 pints]

3 pounds Seville or wild sour oranges (see note)

3 quarts water • 12 cups pure cane sugar

12 cups (3 quarts) freshly squeezed or packaged not-from-concentrate orange juice

•Using a vegetable brush or plastic scrubber, clean the surface of the oranges. Put them into a large pot with the 3 quarts of water. Bring this up to a simmer and cook for an hour and a half. At this point, the skin of the oranges will be quite tender and easily pierced. Set the oranges out to cool and pour off and discard the water.

•Preheat the oven to warm (170°F). Pour the sugar into a pan or ovenproof bowl and set it in the oven to heat. (This step is optional, but it will speed up the marmalade making.) Put one or two thick china plates into the freezer compartment. Also, fill a medium-size pot half full of water and start it boiling. Use this to sterilize the preserving jars and their lids while the marmalade cooks, setting them out on a rack to dry as you remove them from the pot.

•When the oranges are cool enough to handle, cut them in half and remove the pips. Gather these together and tie them up in a small piece of cheesecloth. Using a very sharp knife, slice the orange halves in half again and then cut these, peel and pulp together, into thin strips.

•In a large pot, preferably wider than it is tall, put the cut-up oranges, the orange juice, and the warmed sugar. Bring to a roiling boil over high heat and then reduce the heat some, but keep the contents

The Tangy and the Sweet

Oranges.—There are several varieties of this most excellent and refreshing fruit. The largest and best are from St. Augustine, and sell at the highest prices.
—Thomas De Voe, The Market Assistant (1867)

The Florida juice orange is less a fruit than a selling strategy, a way of acknowledging—while at the same time waving away—the fact that the orange in question probably has seeds and may prove difficult to peel and impossible to divide into segments. The word "juice," it seems, has the evocative strength to overcome almost any number of negatives. But to the marmalade maker, who might like to know the *variety* of the orange at hand, it tells us precious little. The best way to tell juice oranges apart, in most instances, is by season, as the crop of one variety supplants the one before as winter passes by.

Parson Brown (October-December). Originated as a chance seedling in the dooryard of Rev. N. L. Brown, near Webster, Florida, the Parson Brown has been in cultivation since 1856 and was Florida's leading early orange until it was edged out by the Hamlin in the 1920s. It fell out of favor because it is seedy and almost impossible to peel. But its flesh is juicy, full-flavored, and an attractive deep orange color. *Good bet—if you can find it.*

Hamlin (October-December). The Hamlin also first appeared as a chance seedling—this time in 1879, near Deland, Florida, in the orchard of A.G. Hamlin. These oranges are medium-size, range in color from deep yellow to pale orange, and have a smooth, thin, easily removed skin and few seeds. Their juice is sweet but somewhat thin—*not best for marmalade*.

Pineapple (December-February). This orange was brought from China to Charleston, South Carolina, and planted by Rev. J.B. Owens at Sparr, near Citra, Florida, around 1860. It is a smooth, thin-skinned variety with a bright yellow-orange rind (hence its name). The flesh is seedy, but it produces a bright-colored orange juice with a notably tart taste. *A good bet.*

Temple (January-February). Although categorized in most supermarkets as an orange, the Temple is actually a Tangor (a cross between an orange and a tangerine). Apparently it originated in Jamaica and was introduced to Florida about 1896—although it was not named until 1919. It is medium-size, deep orange in color, and possessed of a pebbly peel that is easy to remove. *Top rated*.

Valencia (March-June). This orange, by far the best of all juice oranges, was discovered in the Azores in the early 1860s and sent to a nurseryman at England, who in turn sent it on to America. The Valencia is orange to yellow in color, sometimes with hints of green. The rind is smooth to lightly pebbled, thin, and easily removed. The flesh is nearly seedless and very juicy, producing a medium- to bright-colored orange juice that is sweet, full-flavored, and tangy. *Top rated*.

boiling steadily. Use a ladle or skimmer to remove any persistent scum. After 20 minutes, deposit half a teaspoon of the contents of the pot onto one of the chilled plates and return it to the freezer. Continue to do this every 4 or 5 minutes until the last bit, when prodded with a finger, is clearly jelled and semi-firm. (At this point, when to stop is a matter of taste; in our opinion, cooking jam to a rigid set is like grilling a steak until well done.)

• Discard the bag of pips, stir the marmalade to evenly distribute the peel, and ladle it into the waiting jars, using a preserving funnel to keep the hot marmalade from landing on your fingers. Fill each to within 1/2 inch of the top, then seal tightly with the screw-on lids. Set them back on the rack to cool overnight. Then refrigerate and let mellow for at least two weeks before broaching.

☛ **Cook's Notes**. If you don't have a friend or relative in the citrus-growing states to send you wild sour oranges (or if you simply want to use the real thing), you can order genuine Seville oranges from the **Florida Citrus Stand**, in amounts ranging from a quarter bushel (16 to 20 oranges) for $19.95 to a full bushel (60 to 80 oranges) for $39.95 (prices do not include shipping, which is reasonable). Orders can be sent to Canada as well (and to Europe, although talk about coals to Newcastle...). Florida Citrus Stand • 1715 E. Fowler Ave. #102, Tampa FL 33612 • (866) 818-2700 • www.flcitrusstand.com.

Temple Orange Marmalade

(based on a recipe from Preserving Today, by Jeanne Lesem)

"[Temple oranges] make an exceptional marmalade," writes Helen Witty in Fancy Pantry, and her enthusiasm for this cross between an orange and a tangerine got us interested in trying it ourselves. We had already been experimenting with Jeanne Lesem's single-piece-of-fruit lemon

marmalade recipe and found it worked equally well with Temple oranges. In contrast with the marmalade recipe above, this one and the variations that follow produce a notably clear preserve packed with fresh fruit taste. Slicing the fruit before cooking makes it possible to cut the rind very thinly, creating tender, thread-like slivers that marry perfectly with this gentler—but still full-flavored—marmalade.

[MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS]

about 6 to 8 Temple oranges • pure cane sugar

•Choose the nicest orange and use a vegetable brush or plastic scrubber to clean its surface. Trim off the very top and bottom. Then slice the fruit in half from stem to blossom end and cut these halves in half again the same way. Using a very sharp knife, slice each of these quarters, rind and pulp together, as thinly as possible, discarding any seeds. This should yield about 3/4 cup. Squeeze enough of the other Temple oranges to amply cover the sliced fruit with juice (we used about 2 cups). Cover and let sit at room temperature for about 24 hours.

•Transfer everything to a saucepan, bring to a boil, uncovered, then boil gently about 15 to 20 minutes, or until the peel is tender and translucent (see note about boiling the peel above). Measure the contents of the saucepan, pour this into your preserving pot, and stir in three-quarters that measure of sugar. (For example, we had approximately 2 cups of orange juice, peel, and pulp after boiling, and so added 1 1/2 cups of sugar.)

•Put one or two thick china plates into the freezer compartment and fill another pot with enough water to sterilize the preserving jars. Bring the sugar and fruit mixture to a roiling boil over high heat and then reduce the heat some, but keep the contents boiling steadily. Use a ladle or skimmer to remove any persistent scum. Meanwhile, sterilize the preserving jars and their lids.

• After 15 minutes, deposit half a teaspoon of the contents of the pot onto one of the chilled plates and return it to the freezer. Continue to do this every 4 or 5 minutes until the last bit, when prodded with a finger, is clearly jelled and semi-firm.

•At this point, turn off the heat, stir the marmalade to evenly distribute the peel, and ladle it into the waiting jars, using a preserving funnel to keep hot preserves from landing on your fingers. Fill each to within 1/2 inch of the top, then seal tightly with the screw-on lids. Set them back on the rack to cool overnight. Then refrigerate and let mellow for a few days before broaching.

Variations

The following are examples of how we used the above recipe to make a series of small-batch marmalades, adapting it as necessary to the needs and virtues of each particular fruit. Given variations in size and weight, directions cannot be—and should not be treated as—ironclad. The formula, however, is simple: cut up the fruit, cover it generously with juice, boil it to soften the peel, measure it, add approximately three-quarters that amount of sugar (sour fruit like lemons or limes will require more), and cook it until it jells.

Florida Navel Orange Marmalade. (If substituting California navels, choose plump, firm oranges with smooth, tight skins.) Prepare 1 orange following the directions for Temple marmalade above, but cut each navel orange half into thirds rather than halves. Depending on yield, squeeze enough additional oranges to cover the sliced orange amply with juice.

(We got 1 1/3 cups of peel and pulp from our largish orange and covered this with 3 cups of juice—which required 8 more navels). After the initial boiling, the pulp/juice measurement was 3 1/3 cups; to this we added three-quarters this measure of sugar, or about 2 1/2 cups. The yield was about 3 cups. **Note**: Navels vary widely in vivacity of flavor; taste the contents of the pot after all the sugar has been dissolved. If the flavor is insipid, perk it up by adding 1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice for each cup of pulp and juice that went into the pot before you added the sugar.

Meyer Lemon Marmalade. A friend in California sent us a small box of these, and we immediately made a lovely marmalade from them. Meyer lemons have a more flowery aroma and sweeter flavor than ordinary lemons; they make a choice marmalade. Also, their peel is so thin and tender that it shouldn't require a preliminary boiling. Our lemon, trimmed, quartered, and sliced very thinly, produced about 2/3 cup of sliced peel, to which we added 3/4 cup each of lemon juice and water. After a day of soaking, we added an equal (instead of three-quarters) measure of sugar and prepared the marmalade following the master recipe, with a yield of approximately 2 cups. **Note**: To make a marmalade of ordinary lemons, choose especially firm fruit with smooth, tight skins. Follow the instructions and proportions for Temple orange marmalade, but as with the Meyer lemon version use a half-and-half mixture of lemon juice and water and use an equal measure of sugar.

Key Lime Marmalade. We bought a mesh bag of key limes (a little over a pound) at the supermarket and selected half a dozen of the nicest looking, which together weighed about as much as a plump lemon. We scrubbed these, halved them from stem to blossom end, and sliced them as thinly as we could (easiest to do when the cut side faces down), discarding the tiny seeds. This resulted in about 2/3 cup of sliced peel and pulp. Then we juiced the rest of limes, getting a total of 1/2 cup. To this we added 1 cup of water, We poured this over the lime slices and let everything sit at room temperature for 24 hours. After the initial boiling, the pulp/juice measurement was close to 2 cups. As with the Meyer lemon marmalade, we added an equal measure of sugar, then proceeded as directed in the master recipe. This set very quickly—in about 20 minutes—and produced 2 cups of marmalade. Note: We also made this marmalade using Persian (common green) limes. It was perfectly fine, but not quite as good as this.

lemon-pineapple marmalade boiling in the pot

Pineapple Lemon Marmalade

(adapted from Fine Preserving, by Catherine Plagemann)

I came across this recipe in a search only casually related to the marmalade adventures narrated above. One day, after Matt and I had eaten a particularly fine pineapple that had been filling our apartment with its lovely aroma for days, I

got to wondering whether you could make a marmalade that combined that aroma and flavor with lots of chewy shreds of the fruit itself. Catherine Plagemann's recipe actually improved on that fantasy, because the added lemon curbs what otherwise would be a cloying sweetness while adding an welcome touch of bitter zest. Wait to make this until you spot a noticeably fragrant pineapple that signals its ripeness with an exterior that is all yellow/orange instead of green. The reason for making the sugar syrup is to shorten the cooking time of the marmalade itself, and so capturing the bright pineapple taste, which would otherwise be muted. Prepare the syrup in a deep pot and watch it carefully to keep it from boiling over.

[MAKES ABOUT 2 PINTS]

1 ripe pineapple (see above)

4 cups pure cane sugar

1 1/2 cups canned unsweetened pineapple juice

juice of 2 lemons and zest of 1 of them

1/2 cup water

•Slice the top and bottom off the pineapple, cut away the peel, and remove the eyes. Cut the fruit in half and cut each half lengthwise into quarters, to make eight segments in all. Trim away the tough core section from each of these, then slice the flesh with a very sharp knife as thinly as you can (or feed it, 2 or 3 segments at a time, through the slicing disc of a food processor). Reserve any juices as well. The yield will be approximately 3 cups. Pour the lemon juice over this.

•Slice the lemon zest into thread-like strips. Put it in a small pot with the half cup of water, bring this to a boil, reduce it to a simmer, and cook the lemon strips for 15 minutes, adding more water if necessary to keep them from boiling dry. Add the peel (and any remaining water) to the sliced pineapple.

•In a large pot, dissolve the sugar in the pineapple juice and bring this mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, watching it all the while to prevent it from boiling over. Lower the heat as soon as it starts to bubble, but keep it boiling rapidly for 5 minutes, skimming away any persistant scum.

•Put one or two heavy china plates into the freezer compartment and fill another pot with enough water to sterilize the preserving jars and their lids.

•Combine all the ingredients in a large pot. Bring this to a roiling boil over high heat and then reduce the heat some, but keep the contents boiling steadily. Use a ladle or skimmer to remove any persistent scum. After 15 minutes, deposit half a teaspoon of the liquid from the pot onto one of the chilled plates and return it to the freezer. Continue to do this every 4 or 5 minutes until the last bit, when prodded with a finger, is clearly jelled and semi-firm.

•At this point, turn off the heat, stir the marmalade to evenly distribute the peel, and ladle it into the waiting jars, using a preserving funnel to keep the hot marmalade off your fingers. Fill each to within 1/2 inch of the top, then seal tightly with the screw-on lids. Set them back on the rack to cool overnight and then refrigerate. ■

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Marmalade is surely one of very few preserves that are worthy of serious study, and C. Anne Wilson's short, pithy, and rewarding THE BOOK OF MARMALADE (revised edition; Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2000) gives the subject full justice, enlivening the tale with flashes of dry wit, vintage photographs, and a concluding section of historical and contemporary recipes. Anyone interested in Scottish foodways should seek out a secondhand copy of Catherine Brown's scholarly and quietly passionate BROTHS TO BANNOCKS: COOKING IN SCOTLAND 1690 TO THE PRESENT DAY (London: Murray, 1990), which has unconscionably been allowed to fall out of print. Brown is as much at home before a crofter's fireplace as she is in an Edinburgh tavern (circa 1786) or a Glasgow slum (circa 1945): a book rich with historical insight, Scottish lore, and many, many recipes. Equally rewarding in their own way are two excellent books by F. Marian McNeill—THE SCOTS KITCHEN (London: Blackie & Son, 1929) and, especially (as regards this essay), THE BOOK OF BREAKFASTS (London: Alexander MacLehose, 1932). The subject is the British

concluded on page 17

Fiore di finocchio

Fennel pollen is one of the most exciting flavors of central Italian cooking and a well-kept secret....[It] is never sold commercially, which is why almost no one knows about it. Even in Sicily, where wild fennel grows with abandon and the green fronds are used in many dishes, no one has ever heard of using fennel pollen.

—Faith Willinger, Red, White & Greens

Whatever else might be said about fennel pollen, it is certainly a secret no longer. And I suspect that the entire page Faith Willinger devoted to it in Red, White & Greens: The Italian Way with Vegetables had quite a bit to do with that; her introductory sentence, quoted above, is the sort of statement that publicists kill for, all the more so since it's actually true—including the "almost no one knows about it" part. I wasted several hours going through our collection of Italian cookbooks to see if I could find a single mention of it prior to this one—even in the Tuscan ones (although I'm sure this omission will be rectified from here on in).

Before we move on to the "one of the most exciting flavors" part, it's worth noting that if anyone had written about wild fennel pollen a decade or so ago, the tone, even the import, of that mention would have been quite different. If someone decides to devote a whole page to an unknown, impossible-to-find ingredient, it's because their sixth sense says that its time has come. As with extra-virgin olive oil in the 1970s and balsamic vinegar a decade later, at a certain moment a willingness to pay what previously would have seemed an extortionate amount becomes palpable enough to be sniffed out by a food writer on the spot...and, perhaps more importantly, by an adventurous entrepreneur.

In this instance, it was Ari Weinzweig, the guiding palate of Zingerman's Deli, who, in 2000—four years after Red, White and Greens appeared (and two after Flavors of Tuscany, in which Nancy Harmon Jenkins discussed the same subject with equal fervor)—dropped by at the butcher shop of Dario Cecchini, in Panzano, a small Tuscan town. An enthusiast of traditional practices, Dario hand-gathers, dries, and crushes the pollen-laden wild fennel flowers himself, using the result to season cuts of pork.

Good Things

When Ari asked about the possibility of purchasing the fennel pollen alone, Dario showed him a baby-food-size jar, and Ari decided he might as well buy two. After all, he wasn't in the neighborhood that often. Dario filled the little jars and, with them, presented a bill that, incredibly, seemed in the vicinity of a hundred dollars.

Not wanting to look like the ignorant American tourist I am, I reach into my pocket to get some money, hoping I have enough, all the while recalculating the conversion. For better or worse, my original calculation is about right. Whatever this fennel pollen is, it isn't inexpensive.

No joke. When this essay appeared in the November/December 2000 issue of Zingerman's News, the price for 49 grams was eleven dollars, or $102 a pound. Today, two years later, Zingerman's is asking twenty dollars for the same amount ($185 a pound) and having a hard time keeping it in stock. True, saffron is more expensive still, but producing saffron is so labor-intensive that, like true balsamic vinegar, you at least feel that you are paying for something else besides the failure of supply to catch up with demand.

Wild fennel, which looks very much like dill (to which it is closely related)—the same bright green, feathery leaves topped with

spreading umbrels of tiny yellow flowers—is native to southern Europe and grows profusely there. Since turning its blossoms into *fiore di finocchio* is no big deal, I don't doubt that Sicilian (or even Croatian) peasants are already draping the outsides of their cottages with swags of the stuff. If so, prices may well plunge in the foreseeable future—at least for those who don't require the hand-plucked-on-Tuscan-hillsides seal of authenticity.

(One of the places blessed with acres of wild fennel is California, and you can already buy the pollen from a company harvesting it there. But, like everything else with trendiness stamped all over it, California wild fennel pollen is even more expensive than the Tuscan version—15 grams for twelve dollars, or $363 a pound...which is really starting to nip at saffron's heels.)

Granted all this, you might wonder if there is any point in spending twenty bucks for a tiny container of wild fennel pollen right now. Well, yes, there is—or at least I can tell you why I did. The stuff is freakin' awesome. And, as Ari details, the effect doesn't exactly sneak up on you.

> With a certain swagger, [Dario] opens the jar and pushes it towards me to smell. I lean over to do so, but the aroma hits me long before I even get close. The smell of wild fennel pollen is, quite seriously, something else. The perfume fills the room rather quickly. Truth be told, in twenty years of cooking and traveling, I've never before, nor since, smelled anything quite like it. Its aroma is sweet, pungent, smelling intensely of everything great about fennel and then some. I haven't even eaten it yet, but on aroma alone, the stuff is amazing.

Up to now, quite frankly, the phrase "everything great about fennel" would have elicited an incredulous snicker from me. But wild fennel pollen takes that anise-drenched monotone and imbues it with a highly potent resiny complexity. While there truly is no easy comparison, my first sniff of wild fennel pollen did remind me of my first encounter with fresh basil, when before I had been familiar only with the one-dimensional flavor of the dried version. Then, as now, it was as if someone had flipped a switch and a black-and-white world was suddenly drenched in color.

> Fennel pollen is a typical Tuscan ingredient used throughout that region's repertoire of dishes, traditionally as a spice in the salumerie of Italy in salamis and sausages. Often applied as a rub for pork or poultry—mix it with rosemary and crushed garlic—it also combines well with other dried herbs and spices. Add it to fish soups or sprinkle it on roasted vegetables....
>
> —Rolando Beramendi, Manicaretti Imports

Once I tired of sniffing the container of wild fennel pollen that I had ordered from Zingerman's, I started using it in our cooking...cautiously. Even a tiny pinch made a spectacular match with sautéed zucchini (see the recipe for same in **SC**•73). We also liked the flair it gave to such pasta regulars as fusilli with chickpeas and spinach (see Pot on the Fire, pages 203-204). And it added an appreciable depth of flavor to our butternut risotto (see same, pages 67-68). Furthermore, it called up some ideas for dishes all by itself, starting with

Shrimp with Fennel Pollen

[serves 2 or 3]

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 garlic cloves, finely minced

1 teaspoon wild fennel pollen

1/4 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 pound jumbo shrimp in the shell

1/4 cup dry white wine, diluted with a little water

crusty bread for mopping duty

• Pour the olive oil into a bowl and stir in the seasonings, mixing well. Rinse the

shrimp under cold running water, shake dry, and add to the bowl. Stir with a spatula so that each shrimp is coated with the seasoned oil, then turn everything out into a deep skillet. Put this over medium heat and cook, stirring often, until the shrimp shells are bright pink and the meat no longer translucent, about 6 to 8 minutes. At this point, pour in the wine-and-water mixture, turn up the heat a bit, and bring the liquid to a boil, turning over the shrimp as you do. The moment it reaches a boil, remove the skillet from the heat, divide the shrimp and the cooking liquid into heated bowls, and serve at once. Peel and eat the shrimp with your fingers, using the bread to sop up the juices.

Those fennel-pollen-seasoned pork cuts in Dario Cecchini's meat case also got me thinking. Nancy Harmon Jenkins published a very tasty-sounding pork roast flavored with it in Food & Wine a while ago, but we don't prepare that dish very often. Recently, though, Cryovac-packaged pork tenderloins have been on sale (buy one, get one free) at our local supermarket, and I had tried several ways of preparing these—slicing them into discs and pounding these into cutlets; marinating them and grilling them over charcoal—none of which resulted in any desire for an encore. What, I wondered, would happen if I sliced the meat open into a long, thin slab, spread it with fennel-pollen-intensive seasoning, and rolled it up again? A simple trick—but, as it turned out, a very successful one, which I can happily recommend to you.

Pork Tenderloin Casa Nostra

[SERVES 4 TO 6]

2 large pork tenderloins (about 12 to 16 ounces each)
1 large garlic clove, finely minced
1 teaspoon wild fennel pollen
1/2 teaspoon paprika or mild chile powder
2 tablespoons very fruity extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons good-quality balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
freshly ground black pepper to taste
bamboo skewers for securing the meat
2 tablespoons butter OR olive oil OR a mixture of both

•Trim off the tapered ends of each tenderloin, reserving these for another purpose. Divide the remaining pieces of meat into halves or thirds, cutting crosswise to make equal-size cylinders. Using your sharpest kitchen knife, gently cut down about a

quarter of an inch into each piece, then turn the blade and slice the meat as if you were using your knife to unroll it. If you accidentally cut through to the surface (or even slice off the piece entirely), just pretend you didn't and keep going. When you're done with both tenderloins, you should have four or six hankie-size rectangles of pork. Unless you're quite talented at this, they'll look a bit ragged, but no matter. This is a very forgiving dish.

•In a small bowl, stir together all the other ingredients—through the salt and black pepper—and brush this mixture evenly onto the upper surface of each piece of meat. Roll these tightly back up and secure the seam with a small bamboo skewer or similar object. (The advantage of using bamboo skewers is that you can snip off their excess length with a pair of scissors.)

•Heat the butter and/or olive oil over medium heat in a skillet large enough to hold the pork roll-ups comfortably. When the mixture is hot, add the meat. Turn it every 3 or 4 minutes, until all sides are nicely brown. Then lower the heat

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Table Talk

Breakfast Doings

Maple Syrup Sundaes, Cynthia Caldwell (Whately, MA). Down the road from us is the Bean's farm and sugar shack. Roger Bean is primarily a syrup producer, but once a year he and Lois set up folding tables and invite the neighborhood to a free pancake breakfast. You have to dress very warmly (think snowmobile outfits) because the shack isn't heated—except when the sap is being boiled down—and the lines are long. But everyone bundles up and chats in line as they wait for a plate of pancakes, sausage, home fries, egg soufflé, and muffins. Folks show up with a dozen eggs, some fruit salad, or a few muffins. Others bring money to buy a half gallon of syrup. Our local country bluegrass band squeezes in somehow and entertains everyone with live music.

To help combat the cold, Mrs. Bean serves a recipe her daughter came up with—Maple Syrup Sundaes. The main breakfast is okay, but what I return for year after year is the paper coffee cup filled with creamy oatmeal and maple syrup, topped with whipped cream and toasted wheat germ. The hot oatmeal melts the whipped cream just around the edges, and each bite mingles all those different textures and temperatures, creamy and crunchy, hot and cold. The dish is truly divine.

Nowadays, I don't bother waiting a whole year for this treat. I make it at home, adding dried cherries or raisins or banana slices—whatever fits my mood. It's not the same as standing outside in the snow, shoulder to shoulder with neighbors I haven't seen since fall, stamping my feet to keep them warm, with my mittened hands wrapped around a steaming hot cup of Maple Syrup Sundae. But sometimes I just can't wait.

Savory Breakfast Dreaming, Sylvia Lovegren (Ridgewood, NJ). My favorite breakfasts these days always fall around the holidays, because there is leftover duck liver pâté and/or blue cheese spread, both of which are delectable on crisp hot toast and, strangely enough, also delicious with piping hot fresh coffee—but only in the morning.

However, the savory breakfast of my dreams I remember from years ago, when I first moved to Hollywood. It was always sunny then (probably still is, there), and I was working at the Sam Goldwyn Studios, which was a totally magical thing for a young, impressionable woman. On my way to work in that pink stucco/white concrete/smoggy-blue-sky world, I stopped every day at the Studio Grill, a small, old-fashioned, linoleum-and-chrome luncheonette, populated almost entirely with other employees of the studio reading the trade papers over their coffee and exchanging an occasional companionable remark.

Every morning I'd order the same breakfast: a small hamburger patty cooked rare, two eggs over very easy, a few fat slices of vine-ripened tomato, hash browns, raisin toast, and coffee. The thing to do—after heavily salting everything but the toast and coffee—was to have a few bites each of hamburger, egg, and tomato. This would give me a glorious puddle of juices—a soul-satisfying blend of deep, dark, salty beef; smooth, creamy egg yolk; and then the high zing of the acid from the tomato—perfect for dunking the next bite of each into. Any juices left over would be scooched up with the last of the hash browns. To round off all the corners, dessert was the buttered raisin toast with a second cup of hot coffee. A perfect meal.

Of course, I don't eat like that anymore, at least not very often. But then it's not as sunny in New Jersey as it was in Southern California. And I'm no longer a young woman. So, for cholesterol's sake, it's mostly oats and lowfat yogurt these days. But there's always California dreamin'....

Breakfast Heaven, Kathleen Cooper (Falls Church, VA). I thought of you and breakfast when we were in Singapore recently. Our hotel laid out a large breakfast buffet with offerings for guests from every imaginable country. There was jook and congee and condiments, a dal porridge or soup, roti, steamed pork buns, little potsticker-type dumplings, ham, bacon, beef bacon, sausages of all types with mustards, eggs cooked Western-style, eggs done Chinese-style—the

thousand-year-old method, it looked like—and, in the European section, cold cuts, cheeses, rye crisps, and salads. Also: soups, thin and brothy with long noodles; fried rice and fried noodle dishes; fried potatoes, country-style (with chunks) and rosti-style (with shreds); yogurt, sweet, nonsweet, and drinkable; mueslis, sweet and savory; and juices, at least ten different kinds—watermelon, mango, orange, lime, tomato, carrot. There were sweet breakfast rolls, like *pain au chocolat*, but also others with cheese and bacon and ham in them. There were croissants and doughnuts and plain French rolls with butter from New Zealand. It looked like almost every culture ate savory breakfasts as well as sweet—in fact, the nonsweet offerings predominated. Jim, my husband, was in heaven. He is a savory breakfast guy, and here was his opportunity to sample every savory breakfast option in the world.

Simple Cooking the Book. I was rooting around in one of our closets the other day and, to my surprise, uncovered a carton of mint copies of the paperback edition of my first book, Simple Cooking (the 1996 North Point reprint, that is, not the 1987 original Penguin edition). If you've sought to buy a copy recently, you will have discovered that the book is out of print—and we know of no plans to reissue it. So, if you'd like to own a new, autographed copy, this is your chance. A carton holds only twenty-eight and, while we don't anticipate a stampede, we're asking those who want one to simply send us a postcard saying so. Then, if demand exceeds supply, we'll hold a drawing, with the winners being those whose postcards have the best pictures. No, no, just joking—we'll draw them at random. The winners will receive a book and an invoice for $15.50 (which includes shipping), plus Massachusetts sales tax if applicable.

Tasting Notes: Wild Fennel Pollen

Currently, I know of only three basic sources for wild fennel pollen and, of those, have tasted only two. I write "basic" because while it is available from several different purveyors as far as I can tell, apart from Zingerman's Deli, which has its own source in Tuscany, these places are all selling the fennel pollen imported by Manicaretti or harvested in California by Sugar Ranch, a division of Pollen Collection & Sales. (Both Faith Willinger and Nancy Harmon Jenkins pointed to California, where wild fennel is a common weed, as a promising source for the pollen.)

Comparing the sample kindly provided to me by Sugar Ranch with Zingerman's Tuscan pollen, I found the former to be more visually attractive, its coarser texture revealing bits of the yellow dried flowers as well as pieces of green twig (see photo on page 12). But its aroma was monochromatically pungent of anise, with none of the heady complexity of the Tuscan variety. As far as taste was concerned, the Tuscan pollen was distinctly bitter, with overtones of anise, whereas the California pollen lacked any bitterness and tasted strongly of licorice.

A possible explanation of this can be found in The Oxford Companion to Food, which distinguishes between two forms of wild fennel, the bitter and the sweet. (The fennel grown for its bulb, which is eaten as a vegetable, is separate again.) Bitter wild fennel is the plant that grows wild in Tuscany, whereas sweet fennel, which was domesticated from it, grows wild in California as an escapee from the gardens of Italian immigrants—who cultivated

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sweet fennel precisely because of its intensified anise flavor.

The choice is yours: do you want complexity or raw power? Or, to put it another way, how crazy are you about the flavor of anise? I'm not, and I don't believe that if my first encounter with wild fennel pollen had been the California pollen gathered by Sugar Ranch I would be writing about it now. However, they also sent me a sample of a farmhouse Monterey Jack flavored with their pollen, and I found it surprisingly good, if a little twiggy—much superior to the dill- and sage-flavored cheeses of the same ilk. So I'm keeping an open mind—at least until we've had more experience using it in our cooking.

Sources

[Note: I've spent some time online checking out sources of wild fennel pollen and have found that a majority of these are reselling that gathered by the Sugar Ranch. Look for the word "California" in the description.]

✔**Zingerman's Deli**. Hand-gathered and -processed wild fennel pollen from Tuscany. Powerful, complex aroma; taste is intriguingly bitter, with overtones of anise. Comes with recipes and helpful information. $20 for a 45-gram (1.6-ounce) canister, plus $8 shipping. Can be ordered online. Zingerman's, 422 Detroit St., Ann Arbor MI 48104 • 888-636-8162 • www.zingermans.com. Tell Mo we sent you.

✔**Sugar Ranch**. Hand-gathered and -processed wild fennel pollen from California. Aggressive anise aroma and flavor, more potent but not as complex as the Tuscan variety. Comes with recipes and helpful information. $12 for a 15-gram (0.5-ounce) tin, plus $6 shipping. Can be ordered online. Sugar Ranch, P.O. Box 608, Goshen, CA 93227 • 800-821-5989 • www.fennelpollen.com.

✔**Borghini Wild Fennel Pollen**. **BEST BUY**. Hand-gathered and -processed from Tuscany and imported by Manicaretti (a noted importer of Italian artisanal foods). Not tasted. $65 for a 200-gram (7.1-oz.) cellophane bag, plus $7 shipping. Available from the Mount Horeb Mustard Museum, P.O. Box 468, Mount Horeb WI 53572 • 800-438-6878 • www.mustardmuseum.com. Can be ordered online. While this is a fantastic buy, remember that a little of this seasoning goes a long way; unless you're a chef, 200 grams will last you several years (although, divvied up in tiny jars, it would make for some excellent Christmas presents).

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breakfast in general, but the book's heart is in the Highlands. Otherwise, texts referred to in the body of the essay include:

Davidson, Alan (ed.), The Oxford Companion to Food (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999).

Grigson, Jane, Jane Grigson's Fruit Book (New York: Atheneum, 1982).

Lesem, Jeanne, Preserving Today (New York: Knopf, 1992).

Plagemann, Catherine, Fine Preserving (M. F. K. Fisher's Annotated Edition, Berkeley: Aris, 1986).

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Witty, Helen, Fancy Pantry (New York: Workman, 1986).

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slightly and continue to cook until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of each roll-up (via one of its ends) reads 150°F to 155°F or until a visual inspection shows the meat in the center to be a light pink. (Remember that the meat will continue to cook after it is removed from the heat.) As soon as the roll-ups are done, transfer them from the skillet to a warmed plate and let them rest for 10 minutes, covered with foil, before removing the skewers and serving.

Some final thoughts. I'm just as susceptible as the next guy to the tug of the new, especially to something that makes such a stunning first impression as wild fennel pollen. Even so, in my own opinion, it is closer to being another ingredient-of-the-minute (think pomegranate syrup) than a lasting influence on our cooking. When push comes to shove, it has the same limited range as any other herb, even if within that range it exercises genuinely transformational powers.

In this regard I think of oregano, an herb so familiar to us that, paradoxically, we have forgotten how good it can be. In Greece, where it is truly appreciated, it is gathered much as wild fennel is, in stalks with the just blossoming flowers still attached. These flowers are also full of pollen, and its resiny intensity can be equally provocative. There was a short time when you could purchase such hand-gathered bunches at most specialty food stores. But interest waned—and now, usually, you have to find a Middle Eastern import store to get hold of them. Wild fennel pollen reminds us again that what we give to an herb in terms of respect, it gives back to us in potency and flavor. ■