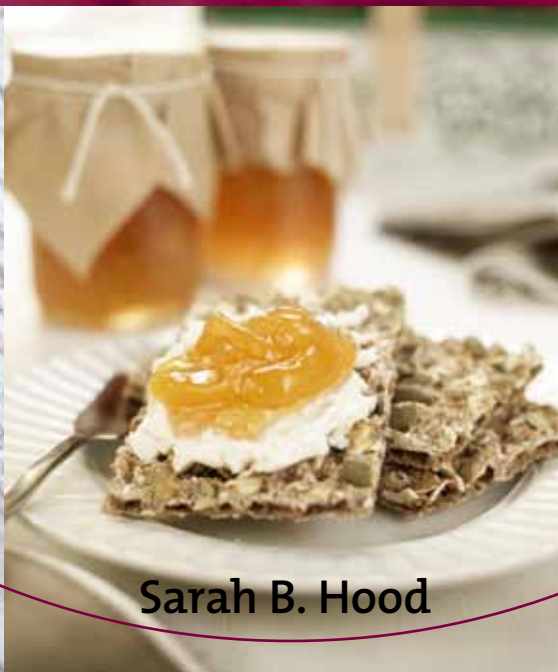




WE SURE CAN!

How Jams and Pickles are Reviving the Lure and Lore of Local Food



Sarah B. Hood



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Recipes for Fall

The poet John Keats's "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" brings some of the most important produce for preserving: plum tomatoes for sauce, pickling cucumbers, and the new crop of apples, rich with pectin and perfumed with their own tangy fragrance.

As the temperature starts to dip, it's cozy to be in a warm kitchen next to a steaming pot of preserves.

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Tomato Sauce

Makes 6 qt (L) jars.

18 lb (8 kg) paste tomatoes

1 large bunch fresh basil, finely chopped

(optional) dried herbs (e.g., thyme, oregano) to taste

2 tbsp sugar, or to taste

salt, to taste

ground black pepper, to taste

¾ cup lemon juice

Tip: If you're canning tomatoes in quantity, wear gloves while handling them to protect your skin from the acidity. It won't actually burn you, of course, but after a while it really dries out your skin.

If you do no other canning, put up a few jars of tomatoes with this very simple sauce. You'll be delighted to be able to cook with fresh-tasting tomatoes in January. This recipe can be made in vast quantities, in which case it's fun to call in friends for help. If you get really serious about tomato sauce, consider investing in a machine that will skin and seed them for you.

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet, on flap.)

Skin the tomatoes by immersing them in boiling water for about a minute, then into cold water. The skins will slip off easily.

Quarter the tomatoes, remove the seeds (over a strainer, to save as much juice as possible) and chop them coarsely. (I use an old-fashioned meat grinder.)

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine the tomatoes, chopped basil, herbs (if using), sugar, salt, and pepper. Bring to a full, rolling boil, then turn down heat slightly and boil gently for 2 to 3 hours until the mixture has reached a meaty thickness.

Because tomatoes are on the borderline of safe acidity, add 2 tbsp of lemon juice to each qt/L jar (1 tbsp per pint/500 mL, or 3 tbsp per 1.5 qt [L] jar).

Ladle the sauce into sterilized jars, leaving ½ in (1 cm) of headspace. Run a plastic or wooden knife or chopstick around the inside of the jar to release any trapped air bubbles. Top up if necessary.

Seal with warm lids and process at a rolling boil: 35 minutes for pint (500 mL) jars, 40 minutes for qt/L, or 50 minutes for 1.5 qt/L.

Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.

Aunt Edith's Chili Sauce

From Tom Boyd (Toronto; not previously published)

Like Gen's Pickle (p.168), this is a pioneer-style recipe, good for using up extra field tomatoes (not paste tomatoes). An old-fashioned “chili sauce,” it has no hot spice. Tom, a dedicated cook of prize-winning preserves, says he enjoys it with cheese and crackers. It could be canned when it reaches a saucy consistency and used like a salsa dip, or finished to a much thicker consistency that would not drip off a cracker. The recipe can easily be halved or even quartered, but be careful not to change the proportion of vinegar to vegetables.

Makes 12 cups (thick consistency), or up to 18 (saucy consistency).

18 lb (8 kg) field tomatoes

6 medium onions

3–4 cups sugar (to taste)

2 cups white vinegar (at least 5 percent acid)

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp pickling salt

6 tsp pickling spice

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet, on flap.)

Skin and quarter the tomatoes and chop the onions.

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine the tomatoes, onions, sugar, vinegar, cinnamon, and salt. Add the pickling spice tied in a muslin or cheesecloth bag.

Boil until the liquids have been reduced by at least half and the mixture begins to thicken (at least 45 minutes).

Remove the spice bag and ladle the sauce into sterilized jars, leaving ½ in (1 cm) of headspace. Run a plastic or wooden knife or chopstick around the inside of the jar to release any trapped air bubbles. Top up if necessary.

Seal with warm lids and process for 10 minutes at a rolling boil (15 minutes for pint/500 mL jars). Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.

Use a plastic lid after the jar is open to keep the vinegar from corroding the metal one.



Tomatoes are the great argument for canning. It takes some work to scald, peel, and seed them, but a jar of whole or crushed tomatoes, or tomato sauce, preserves that intoxicating summer scent all through the winter, at a cost that can be as little as one-third that of buying them at the grocery store. A jar of luscious, bright red, home-canned tomatoes beats the gray, woody winter tomato from the grocery store hands down, every time.

Furthermore, tomatoes are among the foods that can be raised (with a good growing season and a little luck) in considerable abundance in a small space. Even a balcony, an apartment rooftop, or a sunny backyard can produce a

respectable harvest. These days, with the growing interest in preserving heirloom fruits, home gardeners can choose among varieties as small as quarters or as large as grapefruits. They may be yellow, green, orange, purple, black, or white as well as red, solid or striped, smooth or deeply ridged.

Mexico was the home to the ancestors of most of the plants that one might propagate today (the huge, deeply ridged Zapotec variety is an ancient one). The development of so much diversity is partly the result of investigations by commercial producers who need fruit that can be mechanically harvested and which travels well, partly to painstaking research by some very dedicated explorers and plant geneticists,



and partly to groups like Seeds of Diversity, who work to make sure older and rarer types are still being grown every year.

As a veggie gardener, I'm hooked on the tiny, yellow abundantly fruiting Blondköpfchen (which literally means "little blonde heads"), the very sweet, smooth, green-and-yellow striped Green Zebra, and the dark and meaty Purple Prince. All of these can be canned ... with just a grain of caution.

Tomatoes lie on the risky borderline between high- and low-acid fruit. Underripe, green tomatoes are more acidic than ripe ones. And apparently, commercial varieties have been bred for more sweetness and lower acid

over the years, so the ones at your grocery store may be less acidic than the ones in your grandmother's garden. Furthermore, when it comes to heirloom varieties, the acid content is all over the map, so it's best to add extra acid when you can them: a tablespoon of lemon juice to a pint (500 mL) jar is the rule of thumb.

Some great books about tomatoes:

The Heirloom Tomato: From Garden to Table by Amy Goldman (a mouthwateringly photographed and enormously informative catalogue of tomato varieties by an expert in growing and cooking them).

Ripe: The Search for the Perfect Tomato by Allen Arthur (an absorbing history of tomato breeding that documents the work of the passionate and quirky botanical explorers and geneticists who have brought us the tomatoes we know and love).



When it comes to Red Delicious apples, which side of the debate are you on? Or were you hitherto unaware that this unassuming apple exemplifies the divide between large-scale farming and the local food movement?

A brief biology lesson is necessary first: The apple does not grow true to seed. This means that if you planted all the seeds from all the apples on a single McIntosh tree, you might not come up with a single McIntosh sapling. Depending on the pollen wafting through the air in your neighborhood, you'd likely get a field of apple mutts. Some might be good for eating, others not so much. Of course, you could discover the next great apple variety.

If you want to produce more McIntosh trees, you must graft McIntosh branches onto some other apple tree. All commercial varieties are propagated this way. The original McIntosh tree was a chance find in the field of a Dundela, Ontario, farmer named John McIntosh in 1811. Luckily, a visitor showed McIntosh how to take grafts from his tree—the world came close to missing out on one of its most popular and useful apples!

Among the other apples discovered by chance are the Russet, Northern Spy, and the comparatively recent Ambrosia, which appeared in Canada's Okanagan Valley in the 1980s. Many types—such as Cortland, Empire, Jonagold, Fuji, and Gala—were developed in agricultural

research stations. Slow Food USA estimates that more than 15,000 apple varieties have been grown in North America. However, fewer than 3,000 are readily available today, and on my home turf of Ontario, only fifteen are commercially grown, with just three types—McIntosh, Empire and Red Delicious—making up the bulk of the crop.

Why is this a problem? Well, if you happen to sit down and taste a lot of different apples, you'll soon discover that some of the most commonly sold varieties (I'm looking at you, Red Delicious) actually taste bland and mealy, whereas some of the best cooking and eating apples (like Northern Spy, Newtown Pippin, and Russet) are becoming harder to find. This is because large commercial production favors other qualities over taste: a pretty appearance on the shelf, long storage potential, and the ability to resist bruising in transport.

The new crop of North American apples arrives between August and October every year. Many varieties can be stored for several months (some, like McIntoshes, are even said to improve over the first few weeks of storage). But by March, last fall's apples have lost their tangy scent, their taste is duller and sweeter, their skins are thicker and rubbery, and they have lost a great deal of their pectin. That vital pectin, the thing that makes jam cling to toast and jelly

wobble, is crucial for home canning, so there's not much point in using spring and summer apples in preserves.

And think how many canning recipes call for apples! It's worth waiting for the new crop, when even the cheapest bag at the grocery store is perfumed and delicious, or begging neighbors for some fresh, hard green apples from their tree. It's also useful to get to know your local apples and help to maintain a market for the lesser-known varieties, because if farmers have no reason to graft that particular apple onto new stock, we risk losing it forever.

Some great books about apples:

Apples and Man by Fred Lape (a brilliant book by an environmentally aware scientist who loves the old apple varieties).

The Apple: A History of Canada's Perfect Fruit by Carol Martin (a chatty popular history crammed with photos).

The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-eye View of the World by Michael Pollan (the apple is one of four plants discussed; Pollan consistently misspells McIntosh—the computer way—however).

Apples to Oysters: A Food Lover's Tour of Canadian Farms by Margaret Webb (it has a chapter about the discovery of the Ambrosia apple).

Classic Apple Jelly

Besides being the basis for all kinds of herb, wine, and flower jellies, apple jelly is tasty on toast and lovely with sharp cheddar cheese or roast lamb. Use tart, crisp apples; they can even be underripe. Also, it doesn't really matter if the fruit is bruised or insect-damaged; just cut out any brown parts.

Makes about 6 cups.

**6 lb (2¾ kg) apples
(about 18 to 24
medium)**

**about 2 cubic in
(33 cubic cm)**

peeled fresh ginger

4½ cups water

3 cinnamon sticks

**about 8–10 whole
cloves**

about 6 cups sugar

Day 1:

Wash the apples and chop them coarsely without peeling or coring them.

Roughly chop the ginger.

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine all the ingredients except the sugar, and bring to a boil. Turn heat to low and allow the mixture to simmer, stirring occasionally, until the apples have broken down (about 30 minutes).

Put the apple mixture into a jelly bag or 2 or 3 layers of cheesecloth or a wide-weave dishtowel.

{ Tip:
Wet the jelly bag or cloth with water first so it doesn't soak up a lot of valuable juice. Hang it over a bowl to drip overnight. (Do not squeeze the bag, or the jelly will be cloudy.)

Day 2:

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet, on flap.)

Measure the liquid, and add 2¼ cups of sugar for every 2½ cups of juice. Stir well until the sugar dissolves completely.

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, boil gently, stirring frequently and skimming off foam, until it reaches the setting point.

Ladle into sterilized jars, seal with warm lids, and process for 10 minutes at a rolling boil (15 minutes for pint/500 mL jars).

Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.

{ Note:
The contents of the jelly bag will make great compost.

Crabapple Jelly

Dark pink crabapple jelly is not only pretty to look at, but tangy, fresh, and delicious with pork. All crabapple trees produce fruit that can be eaten; however, some varieties produce fruit that is too small, bitter, or mealy to be worth jellifying.

Makes about 5 cups. Wash the crabapples; you do not need to peel, core, or chop them.

**3 lb (1.5 kg) red
crabapples**

In a pot, barely cover the crabapples with water and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, until they have become soft (about 10 minutes).

**about 5 cups
sugar**

Put the crabapple mixture into a jelly bag, 2 or 3 layers of cheesecloth, or a wide-weave dishtowel. Hang it over a bowl to drip for at least 2 hours or overnight. (Do not squeeze the bag or the jelly will be cloudy.)

**about 1/3 cup
lemon juice**

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet on flap.)

Measure the crabapple juice and, in a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, bring it to a boil.

For every cup of boiling juice, add 1 cup of sugar and 1 tbsp of lemon juice. Stir well until the sugar dissolves completely.

Boil, stirring frequently and skimming off the very heavy, thick pink foam, until it reaches the setting point (about 20 minutes).

Ladle into sterilized jars, leaving 1/4 in (6 mm) of headspace. Seal with warm lids and process for 10 minutes at a rolling boil (15 minutes for pint/500 mL jars).

Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.

Easy-Peasy Cranberry Sauce

This is a great recipe for newbies to make—and imagine the satisfaction of being able to tell Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner guests that if they liked it with the turkey, they can take a jar home with them!

Makes 4 cups.

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet, on flap.)

4 cups fresh or frozen cranberries

If using fresh berries, give them a rinse.

1 cup water

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine berries and water. Crush berries with a potato masher or the back of a slotted spoon. Add the cinnamon stick (if using).

(optional) 1 cinnamon stick

Heat the berries just to the boiling point.

3 cups sugar

Remove from heat and add the sugar, stirring until it dissolves completely.

(optional) ¼ cup walnuts, chopped

Return the mixture to the heat, bring to a full, rolling boil that cannot be stirred down, and continue to boil, stirring frequently and skimming off foam, until it reaches the setting point. This will happen much more quickly than with most jams; likely within 5 minutes.

Remove the cinnamon stick (if used). If you are using walnuts, add them now, and allow the cranberry sauce to sit for 5 minutes to incorporate them.

Ladle into sterilized jars, leaving ¼ in (6 mm) of headspace. Seal with warm lids and process for 10 minutes at a rolling boil (15 minutes for pint/500 mL jars).

Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.

Apple-Cranberry Jelly

A clean, fresh-tasting jelly to wake up an autumn breakfast or set off a rich meat dish such as pork chops or sausages.

Makes 3 cups.

Sterilize jars and warm lids. (See full instructions, p. 49, or Bare-bones Cheat Sheet, on flap.)

2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries

Wash the berries (if they're fresh).

2 cups water

In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine cranberries and water. Crush berries with a potato masher or the back of a slotted spoon.

about 1½ cups apple pectin (see p. 69)

Heat the berries to the boiling point; reduce heat to medium and boil gently until the berries have dissolved into pulp (about 10 minutes).

3 cups sugar

When berries are cool enough to work with safely, run them through a sieve or food mill, then through a clean, dampened jelly bag. This should yield 1½ cups of juice.

1 cinnamon stick

Add enough apple pectin to the cranberry juice to make 3 cups in total. In a wide, deep non-reactive pot with a thick bottom, combine all ingredients. Stir until the sugar dissolves completely.

Return the mixture to the heat, bring to a full, rolling boil that cannot be stirred down, and continue to boil, stirring frequently and skimming off foam, until it reaches the setting point.

Remove the cinnamon stick and ladle into sterilized jars, leaving ¼ in (6 mm) of headspace. Seal with warm lids and process for 10 minutes at a rolling boil (15 minutes for pint/500 mL jars).

Remove the canner lid, turn off the heat, and allow the jars to sit in the hot water for another 5 minutes to cool down.



Left: Applesauce. Right: Orange Onion Jam with Sage and Thyme (p. 220). Photo: Niamh Malcolm

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