

The Fragrant News

Autumn 2008

Welcome to The Fragrant News. Here in the Manawatu, as in many parts of New Zealand, there is a continuing drought. Water has to be conserved and the garden hosed prudently to keep plants alive. We utilize the kitchen washing water where possible and bucket it out to the pots and garden plots near the house to help conserve water. Planting will have to wait until the rain comes again. Hopefully that will be soon while there is still warmth left in the soil to help growth. Goodness gardening is a challenge! But having an edible garden with fruit, vegetables and herbs there are plenty of rewards. Hope you can make use of the following recipes so the 'fruits of your labour' can be enjoyed too in the months to come.

Regards,

Marilyn and Ian Wightman

The garden is very full—on this time of year as the harvest is collected and processed. Even though the drought is affecting the whole district the fruit trees set fruit when it was cooler and wet so the harvest has been plentiful. While I consider the kitchen here quite normal visitors often raise their eyebrows as they take in all the activity round the room. There are four demi-johns of wine maturing nicely on the sideboard – elderflower from last November; parsley from December when strong hot winds created such a dry atmosphere the row of parsley all bolted to seed; and two jars of plum wine which continue to 'blip,



blip, blip' as the gas escapes through the airlocks. On the kitchen windowsill the last pine nuts of the harvest from 2007 have opened in the sun. Disappointing, as many of the seedpods are barren. Pine nuts are like sunflower seeds with the strong, impenetrable outer case. The pine nuts that have formed over summer this year are huge so hopefully they will have nuts. It is still a long wait until August when they are harvested from the tree.

Also on the windowsill are the last of the assorted jars of herb oils and vinegars that are processed all summer long. Just some oil infused with comfrey leaf remains to be filtered and then stored away in a dark cupboard for winter processing into ointments. And there is always a jar of rosemary leaves sitting infusing in vinegar. This is used in the final rinsing water when hair is washed. On the open shelf above the kitchen bench are the jars of herb teas. There are different mixes from herbs that have been collected all summer long and dried – red clover, blackberry leaf, lemon verbena, meadowsweet, ginkgo and chamomile. These are the herbs that will die down or lose their leaves for winter so they must be dried now. Other herbs used for teas like rosemary, parsley, yarrow, sage and thyme grow all round in the garden so are always accessible. As the garden is cut back for winter some of these herbs are harvested and dried so they can be given away to friends and family. Especially the ones who live in the city or in rental homes and have limited access to a herb garden. One new flavour tried over the summer as a tea is the kaffir lime leaf. It makes a refreshing and aromatic tea. A kaffir lime tree planted against the side of the

house that receives all day sun is thriving and survived last winter and the frosts. The warm wall must give the tree enough protection on winter's really cold, frosty nights.

Other herbs such as lavender, Balm of Gilead, rose petals and hops are all being cut and dried now so they too can be used for the rest of the year.

The fruit of the garden is nearly all processed. There are still many buckets of quince to transform. Quince chutney is a favoured spicy mix that is always welcome on crackers and scones here. As it also uses our abundant tomatoes then it is a practical recipe to make: -

QUINCE CHUTNEY

7 or 8 quince

1 kg tomatoes

5 onions

1 kg brown sugar

2tsp salt

2 tsp ground ginger

2 tbs curry powder

2 tsp chilli powder

8 cups vinegar

Peel and chop the fruit and onions.

Remove the skins of the tomatoes, chop and add. Include everything else.

Bring to the boil and then slow boil for at least an hour. When thick enough pour into sterile jars and allow to cool before sealing.



Two jams we make use quince. Jelly jam made from quince is the best in the world! The deep apricot hue of the clear jam is always quickly consumed. (Remembering back to early childhood, Grandma Workman recycled the small fish paste jars and filled them with this special, delicious nectar. She made flour and water paste and glued brown paper seals on the top of her jars.) If there is a large harvest and there are too many quinces to process then just boil the fruit and strain through a muslin cloth overnight. Freeze this juice and quince jelly can be made all year round. Apples and crab apples can also be used in this recipe.

QUINCE JELLY

Chop quinces roughly and put into a pot. Add 1 Lt of water for every 500g of fruit. Cook without stirring for ½ hour. Drain through muslin cloth overnight and discard fruit. To every 1litre of juice add 3 large cups of sugar. Bring to the boil, stirring well and boil until the jelly thickens – up to ½ hour. Pour in to sterile pots. Seal when cool.

Fashionable eating places now serve dishes with quince conserve on the side. Personally, we have been eating it as a favoured jam for many years! It makes a very tart, dry paste something similar to marmalade. Like quince jelly I use all the small sized, recycled jars and fill them with this special jam to give away as gifts.

QUINCE OR APPLE CONSERVE

Peel and slice fruit finely. For every three quinces or five apples add ½ cup of water. Bring to the boil till cooked. Mash the fruit with the potato masher. Add 1 cup of sugar to every cup of fruit pulp. (Use ¾ cup of sugar for a sharper tasting conserve). Bring to the boil then reduce heat to a gentle boil. Stir constantly to

reduce the risk of it sticking. Simmer in this way for between one or two hours. When the conserve is very thick and shiny bottle immediately.

Early in autumn we had a surplus of plums. (Hence the TWO demi-johns this year of plum wine.) What I couldn't cope with was sorted, bagged and frozen. When the cupboard gets bare in winter there is the reassurance that these extra plums can be quickly converted into jam or sauce. We have made a really hot spicy sauce that the family put on par with the proverbial commercial tomato sauce. It came into family legend one year when we were dashing out on a Saturday afternoon. The then student son offered to make a batch of Edmond's plum sauce. (That redoubtable cookbook of generations of New Zealand cooks.) There were several ingredients that Markham went about in an unusual fashion. No one was home to ask advice so he improvised! For instance he finely chopped up root ginger instead of adding several spoons full of ginger powder. His recipe for plum sauce has been made ever since.

MARKHAM'S DYNAMIC PLUM SAUCE

3 kg plums
1.8 litres vinegar
1 kg soft brown sugar
1 tsp ground cloves
2 tsp black pepper
1 tsp all spice
3 tsp salt
2 tsp chilli
50g root ginger
100g garlic cloves



Put everything into a large pot. The garlic and ginger needs chopping up first. Bring to the boil then simmer on a slow heat for several hours until the sauce thickens. Sieve and pour into sterilized bottles or jars. Seal well so they are airtight. Wait two months before using.

This year the Black Doris had a big crop. What remained uneaten was made into a plum and elderberry jam. The elderberries were small and dry so they have floated to the top of each pot and are quite visible. Damson plums are not a dessert plum and can only be cooked they are so tart. They make a deep purple jam that is sharp to the taste. If the plums are soaked in a jar of gin they turn the alcohol pink. These plums are delicious with cream or ice cream and the pink gin makes a great cocktail.

The apple harvest keeps happening well into autumn as the successive crops mature. We have planted seven apple trees and chosen varieties that ripen all through the year.

Now the trees are older the crop yield is huge. Visitors all leave with some samples and we never seem to tire of eating them in the many varied forms available. Some is processed into stewed apple pulp and frozen for winter use. This year we have filled several boxes with fresh apples and put them in the old fridge in the garage as an experiment to see if they will keep crisp. Recently in the news there was an item about reviewing the beer fridge in the garage and having a campaign to get rid of them from an environmental pollution and energy use point of view. What a dilemma! Our fridge in the garage was purchased new in 1960 for our widowed grandmother who came to live in her daughter's home. That daughter handed it on down the line in 1990 when she moved house. It has been chugging away quite happily and chills some beer

(home-brewed) plus elderflower and lemon cordials, ginger beer and rose petal fizz drinks. All of these are home made in recycled glass containers and chilled in a nearly 50-year-old fridge.

USING HERBAL DYES

When spent herbs are being cut back to basal clumps in the garden in autumn they have one further use before being consigned to the compost heap. Each autumn skeins of wool are dyed with the cut herbs. There are successful batches and sometimes less spectacular hues obtained. All herbs will yield colour and the trick is to research and find out the desired result depending on which mordant is used. Natural fibre must be first mordanted in a mineral bath. All of this has been tried over several thousand years so records exist as to what can be expected. North American plants are well documented. The goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) has been flowering gloriously and one text on dye plants suggested that if the wool were mordanted in tin, with golden rod it would yield a "screaming yellow". Curiosity aroused at such a description, it had to be tried! The resulting hue is so bright it will have to be knitted wearing sunglasses. Now the term "screaming yellow" is fully understood. The pinecones from the pine nut harvest had been saved for autumn dyeing. "Pinecones can yield a dark brown dye," said one book. But this dye bath produced a disappointing grey- tan shade. An advantage of this ancient craft is to re-dye the wool in another dye bath with different herbs and a satisfactory colour will be obtained in the end. I never seem to have any success with woad and getting blues. One batch my mother tried gave her blue the first time and in reusing the same dye bath she next got pink. It set me wondering if that is where the use of blue for boys and pink for girls originated. Woad dyers in the past were an itinerant lot who moved from one area to the next. As they fermented the woad leaves and used strong ammonia as a chemical in the dye process their bodies absorbed these smells. Consequently they were not the most socially accepted group and often were ostracized.

The autumn vegetable garden is still bountiful. With the dry weather there is one bonus in still enjoying fresh basil with salads and tomatoes everyday. The extended drought does have some small advantages. It will be good to see the rain again though. While less moisture makes for tougher plants and more intense flavour the yield is compromised.

We have made some changes to the website this autumn. A few new varieties are added and a few are sadly no longer available. The prices on the mail order herb range have been increased. It could be held off no more.

Hope you are having a busy and industrious time coping with your autumn harvest!

Happy Herbing!

Marilyn and Ian Wightman

Feilding

New Zealand

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