



Jelly's Last Jam

June Taylor's citrus preserves are anything but sugarcoated.

Eating is one of life's most

social activities, and yet preparing the foods we eat remains one of the most solitary and hidden. Restaurant chefs toil in basements and in windowless kitchens. Cheese makers are tucked away in sterile, white-tiled rooms. Farmers can often count only their tractors as companions.

It was no surprise then, as I headed to the Still-Room, the preserves workshop run by June Taylor in Berkeley, Calif., that the directions took me away from the pulse of this town, away from the bustling Peet's Coffee and the Gardener on Fourth Street, and toward a strip of anonymous industrial buildings — the kind of place where you imagine machines are cranking out widgets and workers are bending sheets of steel.

It was January, citrus season, and while most home cooks think of canning and preserving as a summer affair, Taylor works year round. Preserves would seem a difficult food to make distinctive, yet Taylor's manage to be. They are unlike any commercial preserves, not simply because she uses esoteric — virtually all organic — fruits like bergamots, kadota figs and Santa Rosa plums, but also because she cooks them in such a way that underlines their essence. Sugar is used not as a crutch but a tool. Her silver-lime-and-ginger marmalade has a sting to it; her grapefruit-and-Meyer-lemon marmalade is bright, concentrated and vigorously bitter.

"I'm called a manufacturer," Taylor said, "but I'm not. I'm a craftsperson." She and her assistant, Magali Hernandez, produce 20,000 jars a year, all cooked and packed by hand.

Taylor, a petite woman whose short black hair is flecked with gray, calls her workshop the Still-Room, after the name for the preserving room in old English manor houses — where everything from jams to spirits to medicines were concocted. Inside, the entrance is scattered with large rocks, a Japanese garden bench and a table covered with pine needles. Beyond this lies a spacious kitchen flooded with natural light. Fourth Street's industrial zone seems miles away.

"I'm into the color of nature," Taylor said. "It's really important to me that my work reflects the color of nature." One of her influences is the environmental artist Andy Goldsworthy. "I really like in his movie when he says, 'It's really about understanding where you come from.' That's the way I approach my cooking."

From the kitchen a knife could be heard scraping against a sharpener. Hernandez was prepar-

CANNED GOODS

Making June Taylor's preserves requires some special equipment. A jelly bag is used to extract natural pectin from the fruit. Look for one made of cloth and with a drawstring.

Norpro Jelly Strainer bags come in packages of two for \$3.50 at Zabar's, (212) 787-2000. You may use any kind of citrus juicer, but an inexpensive hand-held citrus reamer is hard to outdo. The best have sharp ridges and are constructed of wood. This one is \$3 at Zabar's. Jelly jars are available at www.homecanning.com. A candy thermometer is \$17 at Sur La Table, www.surlatable.com.



Photographs by Mitchell Feinberg



Sweet Science: From pectin and patience, marmalade.

ing to work on some grapefruits. A sharp knife is an important tool in preserve making, especially marmalade, for which you need to carve the rind and flesh of the fruit.

“A lot of what I do is sorting,” Taylor said. “The best-looking fruit goes into jars, the next into marmalade, the next, juicing.” Taylor cooks her jams in small batches in large pots so they cook rapidly and reach the gel point before they taste cooked. She uses only the fruit’s natural pectin and adds less sugar than most recipes. Christine Ferber, a French preserves maker, writes in her book “Mes Confitures” that jams should be 65 percent sugar. Taylor’s jams are about 20 percent; her marmalades are about 50 to 60 percent.

For Taylor’s grapefruit-and-Meyer-lemon marmalade, Hernandez sliced the grapefruit rind and sectioned the flesh. They were combined in a pot with Meyer lemon cut into squares, so when you eat the marmalade, Taylor said, “you get a burst of Meyer lemon.” Taylor stirred in water, lemon juice and a jelly bag filled with the grapefruit and lemon membranes (for extracting pectin) and simmered it.

The first marmalade is believed to have been a quince paste from Portugal — *marmelada*. According to Alan Davidson in “The Oxford Companion to Food,” the British, who imported it in the 15th century, began making their own thick preserves using bitter oranges and lemons. But it wasn’t until the 18th century that Scottish cooks began using more water in their recipes, creating the spreadable preserve we know as marmalade.

After the first stage of cooking, Taylor added the sugar and began squeezing the jelly bag until the pectin, by then like cream, began filtering out. “It’s like milking a cow,” she said. She swirled the pectin into the cooked grapefruit and lemon, divided the mixture among four pots and then set them all over high heat. Marmalade is the most difficult of the preserves, Taylor said, because you must balance so many things at once — acid, sugar, pectin and water. In the final stage, you want the marmalade to cook quickly so the water evaporates and the flavor crystallizes in a fresh state. “Thirty minutes is nice,” she said. “Forty-five minutes and I’m starting to get edgy.”

When the marmalade was ready, she and Hernandez took their positions at a table covered with jars, fresh from the oven. “Hot jar, hot product, work fast, don’t take phone calls,” Taylor said as she poured the preserve. Soon, 30 jars of glistening marmalade were cooling. Only 19,970 to go.

Taylor’s business is artisanal in every sense. All the fruit is from California. Taylor buys the spirits for her ratafia cordial from a distillery nearby. Her label is printed by a man who makes his own lead type. She harvests rose geraniums for infusions from her own garden. Sometimes she forages

Poached Blood Oranges in Clementine Ratafia

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| 6 clementines, rinsed | 7 ounces sugar, plus 2½ pounds |
| 15 ounces vodka | 13 pounds blood oranges (about 20) |
| 1 4½-inch stick cinnamon, in pieces | 1½ cups lemon juice (from about 5 or 6 lemons). |
| 1 teaspoon coriander seeds, crushed | |

1. To make the ratafia: halve and juice the clementines. Remove the pulp. Thinly slice the peels of 5 clementines. In a jar, combine the clementine juice, peel, vodka, cinnamon, coriander and 7 ounces sugar. Stir, then refrigerate, shaking once a day for the first few days to dissolve the sugar. Store for 2 months (that’s not a typo), then strain through cheesecloth. The ratafia may be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 years.
2. Cut 5 pounds of blood oranges into ½-inch-thick slices, discarding the ends. Juice the rest of the oranges until you get 6 cups of juice. Layer blood-orange slices and remaining sugar in a container. Pour in blood-orange juice and lemon juice. Refrigerate overnight.
3. The next day, transfer slices and juice to 2 large pans. The fruit should be just covered with juice. If not, add a little more juice. Cover with parchment paper. Place over low heat and very slowly bring to a simmer. Simmer until the peel is tender, 30 to 60 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, put 10 sterilized 8-ounce canning jars and lids on a baking sheet and place in an oven preheated to 225 degrees. When orange slices are done, remove jars from the oven. Add a little cooking syrup to the bottom of a jar, then lay in 3 orange slices and pour in 1 tablespoon of clementine ratafia. Fill the jar to the top with more slices and cooking syrup. Add another tablespoon of ratafia. Clean off the rim and tighten the lid. Repeat with the remaining orange slices. (Leftover ratafia may be served as an after-dinner drink with a wedge of clementine.) Makes 9 to 10 jars. *Adapted from June Taylor.*

Grapefruit-and-Meyer-Lemon Marmalade

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| 5 pounds grapefruit, rinsed | ½ cup lemon juice (from 2 to 3 additional lemons) |
| 5 Meyer lemons or small regular lemons, rinsed | 2½ pounds sugar. |

1. Remove the grapefruit skin with a vegetable peeler. Cut the peel into ¼-inch slivers; stop when you have ¾ cup. Discard the rest. Slice off the ends of the grapefruit and the remaining grapefruit peel and pith. Remove grapefruit segments, reserving membrane. Stop when you have 5 cups of segments.
2. Cut the ends off the Meyer lemons, deep enough so you can see the flesh. Leaving the peel on, remove the segments of lemon and reserve the membrane. Cut the segments crosswise into ¼-inch pieces. Put membranes from the grapefruit and Meyer lemons in a jelly bag and tie closed.
3. In a wide and deep pot, combine the grapefruit segments, grapefruit peel, lemon pieces and jelly bag. Add lemon juice and 2½ cups water. Simmer until the grapefruit peel is tender, 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool.
4. Preheat the oven to 225 degrees. Working over a bowl in your sink, squeeze the liquid from the jelly bag; keep squeezing and wringing it out until you extract ⅓ to ½ cup of pectin. Add pectin and sugar to the pot. Place over high heat and boil, stirring now and then, until marmalade is between 222 and 225 degrees and passes the plate test. (Spoon a little onto a plate and put in the fridge for 3 minutes. If it thickens like jam, it is done.)
5. Meanwhile, put 6 sterilized 8-ounce canning jars and lids on a baking sheet and place in the oven. When jam is done, remove jars from the oven. Ladle jam into the jars, filling them as high as possible. Wipe the rims. Fasten the lid tightly. Let cool. If you don’t get a vacuum seal, refrigerate the jam. Makes 6 8-ounce jars of marmalade. *Adapted from June Taylor.*

for fruit. (All these details find their way into her prices. Preserves run about \$10 for an 8-ounce jar; they’re available at www.junetaylorjams.com.)

It may all seem exhaustingly puristic, but when Taylor had a stall at the Berkeley farmers’ market, she was regularly chided for using white sugar in her preserves. She has since moved to the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco. And yet, she still has a bit of Berkeley in her when she talks about her business. “It’s more than making a product,” she said. “It’s a political choice.” It could be argued that ordering her jams from across the country isn’t sustainable and is not a good political choice. But I find them too delicious to resist. ■