

Damson Jam

About these recipes: A damson tree is a great asset on an allotment and a young tree starts producing a good crop within a year or two of being planted. Fresh damsons in late August and September are delicious but by the end of September, they're nearly over. If you have a good harvest, preserve the taste of summer for the rest of the year with a batch of damson jam. The second recipe here makes the best of a less bumper crop, using marrow – which has doesn't have such a strong flavour to add bulk. It also means you can use marrow to make jam – on its own, it has insufficient pectin to set properly.

Ingredients

1.7 kg damsons 2 kg sugar 355 ml water

Method

1. If they come out easily when cut, cut and remove the stones from the damsons.
2. Simmer the damsons in the water, very gently, about 20 minutes, until soft. The stones should be easy to remove when they rise to the top when simmering.
3. Add the sugar and boil rapidly until it sets when tested.
4. Spoon or pour into sterilised jars and put lids on when still warm.

Damson and Marrow Jam

Ingredients

1.35 kg damsons 1.35 kg marrow (prepared weight)
570 ml water Sugar

Method

1. Cook the damsons in half of the water until tender, then rub through a sieve.
2. Cut the marrow into fairly small pieces, put into a pan with remaining water and cook gently at first until some water is drawn from the marrow. Then continue to cook until it is well mashed and tender.
3. Add the damson pulp and weight the combined fruit. Allow the same weight of sugar as pulp (1 kg per 1 kg of fruit pulp)
4. Add the sugar, stir until dissolved and boil rapidly until setting point is reached.
5. Spoon or pour into sterilised jars and put lids on when still warm.

Tips for jam-making

1 Testing for setting point without a thermometer:

- 1 Plate test: Put a teaspoonful of jam on a cold plate and leave for a minute or two in a cool place. If setting point has been reached, the jam will wrinkle when pushed with the finger.
- 2 Flake test: Dip a clean wooden spoon in the pan and lift it out with some of the jam clinging to it. When the jam on the spoon has cooled a little, tilt the spoon and let it drop from the edge. If it has boiled long enough, the jam will partly set on the spoon and the drops will run together, forming flakes which break off sharply and cleanly.

If you are near setting point, remove the pan from the heat while testing, otherwise you could overboil and make the jam too stiff and sticky.

2 Storage. Jams can keep for months or even years if prepared and stored properly, but can go mouldy on top during long storage. Tips to avoid this:

- To sterilise the jars, wash thoroughly in very hot soapy water. Rinse in very hot water then put on a baking sheet in a 140C/Gas Mark 1 oven until completely dry
- Fill jars just short of overflowing. Put a waxed disc cover over the top of the jam, wax side downwards, taking care to leave no air pockets between the disc and the jam where mould could form during storage.
- Put covers on immediately after pouring in jam OR when the jars are cold, not when they are warm. If you cover the jars straight after pouring the jam in, the heat of the jam will dry off any moisture on the disc covers.
- Finally cover with screw lids when cold.
- Store in a dry, airy place away from heat and light.