

Hogtown HomeGrown

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4th place! Out of only four entries

Florida pears and I go way back. I entered a jar of Pear Butter in the Alachua County Fair's jam and jelly contest during the early 1980's and earned 4th place out of four entries. They didn't taste it - only looked at it - and it was ugly! The muddy brown color just didn't do justice to the pears, long-simmered with brown sugar and cinnamon. Oh, if only they had popped the lid!

The first pear tree I ever encountered was in Mrs. Hazen's back yard in the 4100 block of Northwest 11th Street. Her husband built her cute little old-Florida house on a double lot more than 65 years ago. She continued to live there after he died, until her death in the mid 1980's. We were back fence neighbors and she loved our young sons' visits, especially when she could watch them play outside. Her yard had a small garden with a few tomato plants, plus trellised grape vines bursting with fruit, a prickly pear cactus (that our oldest son once hugged) and a huge Florida Sand Pear. Most years the pear tree's branches bent under the weight of the ripening fruit, bringing the limbs down to touch the ground.

We picked them by the bagful, eating a few raw and cooking the rest. We cooked a lot of them with raisins or dried cranberries to serve as a dessert—just imagine baked apples, but substitute peeled pear halves. Until I met Mrs. Hazen, I just made a batch of apple butter every fall. Because her abundant pears were free, I also started making jar after jar of the muddy brown, but tasty, pear butter—4th place Pear Butter!

These days I make pears in all different ways. I am lucky enough to have friends like Joe and Greg from Glades Ridge who give me all the pears I can handle and then a few more! This year's experimental jam is made with pears and cranberries, flavored with lemon, cinnamon and cardamom. I also make a light pear jam with fresh and crystallized ginger. Plus I still cook up some good old muddy brown, yet tasty, pear butter. And finally, after lots of practice through the years, I have perfected Granny's Preserved Pears—thin slices of pear, cooked with sliced lemon in a sugar syrup—just because they are my Mom's favorite!

Granny's Preserved Pears

INGREDIENTS

3 cups raw sugar

1 cup water

12-20 firm pears, peeled, cored and sliced thinly (16 cups or 4 quarts of sliced pears)

1 lemon, thinly sliced and seeded

DIRECTIONS

Over medium-high heat, bring sugar and water to a boil in a large saucepan. When sugar is completely dissolved, gently stir in sliced pears and lemon. Reduce heat to low, so that small bubbles are visible. Cook uncovered for 4-8 hours, until pears are translucent and syrup is thickened. Serve immediately or jar and process for storage.



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What's Fresh Right Now?

- Beans—yard long beans
- Citrus—juices
- Cucumbers—mini seedless, kirby,
japanese/armenian slicers
- Eggplant—white/purple/green, thai
- Garlic—chives
- Grapes—golden/purple muscadines
- Greens—callaloo, molokid spinach
- Herbs—tarragon, chives, basil, holy basil,
lemon basil, spicy bush basil,
italian basil, thai basil
- Honey—orange blossom, gallberry,
tupelo, palmetto
- Microgreens
- Mushrooms—chanterelles
- Okra
- Onions—green, yellow
- Peas—pink eye, white acre, zipper, purple
hull, creamer, black crowder
- Peppers—green/red/yellow sweet bell,
banana, jalapeno, poblano,
hot/sweet banana, black beauty,
cherry bomb, chocolate
- Persimmons
- Pineapple
- Potatoes—red, sweet
- Radish—daikon
- Shoots—pea, sunflower, corn, spring mix
- Sprouts—alfalfa, clover, quinoa, wheat,
sunflower, garbanzo, mung bean,
french lentil, green lentil, radish
- Squash—pumpkin, yellow, spaghetti,
acorn, butternut, zucchini
- Tomatoes—red beefsteak, grape, plum,
green
- Wheatgrass

Basil Time

All the fresh basil available at the market makes me think of pesto. While you can make pesto out of any kind of basil, my favorite is thai basil. With a deep unique flavor, it holds its own against the garlic in pesto, keeping the flavors balanced.

**Local and Fresh—
Beautyberry**

You won't find these little round fuchsia berries at your local farmers market or roadside stand, but you might find them in your yard, or your neighbor's!

Growing in clumps around a common branch or stem, with several clumps on each stem, beautyberries are instantly recognizable and equally mysterious. Many of us have been told the berries are poisonous—they are not. Unripe berries can be very astringent and perhaps, if you ate a large quantity, could cause a tummy ache.

Ripe berries are darker in color and a little soft to the touch. They taste great, in a fleeting sort of way—kind of sweet and sour, but so small that the flavor does not last.

There seems to be only one beautyberry jelly recipe on the internet or my old Florida cookbooks. I wanted more of that elusive taste, so I altered the recipe and came up with a jelly that brings out that beautyberry flavor!

Beautyberry Jelly

INGREDIENTS

- 6 cups berries, stems and leaves removed
- 8 cups water
- juice of one lemon
- 4 cups raw sugar, divided
- 1 package low-sugar pectin

DIRECTIONS

Bring berries and water to a boil in a large pot and cook covered for 20 minutes. Mash with a potato masher or the back of a large spoon and cook an additional 20 minutes.

Strain through a very fine sieve—the seeds are extremely tiny—or use a jelly bag.

Boil liquid to reduce infusion to 4 cups. Mix in lemon juice, stir well and return to boil.

Mix 1/2 cup sugar with pectin. Slowly whisk into liquid and return to boil. Add sugar all at once and boil hard for one minute.

Remove from heat. Pour into prepared jars. Process in boiling water for 10 minutes.

Creamer Peas with Basil

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon butter or olive oil
2 large scallions or 1 shallot, finely chopped
2-3 sprigs of spicy bush or other type of basil
1 quart shelled creamer peas
4 cups water
1/2 teaspoon Kosher salt

DIRECTIONS

In a large heavy pot with a tight fitting lid, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add scallions and basil—just wash the whole bunch and throw it in the pot, stems and all. Continue to stir and sauté until white parts of scallion are softened.

Add creamer peas and stir to coat with butter and scallions. Stir water into peas and bring to a boil. Lower temperature, cover and simmer for 30 minutes.

After 30 minutes, remove lid, stir and add salt. Allow to cook uncovered until peas are tender and broth is thickened—about 45-60 minutes. Remove basil stems before serving.

Serve hot as part of a vegetable plate, over plain brown rice or with cornbread.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Mashed Sweet Potatoes with Chevre

INGREDIENTS

4-6 medium sweet potatoes
1-2 ounces plain chevre (mild, creamy goat cheese)
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground mixed peppercorns

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake washed sweet potatoes directly on oven racks until soft when squeezed. Remove from oven and cool slightly before peeling.

Place peeled sweet potatoes in medium bowl and mash until almost smooth. Use a large fork to whip in the chevre until completely blended. Mix in salt and pepper. Taste for seasoning. Serve immediately.

Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Tricks and Tips
Creamer peas, also known as cream or conch peas, are part of the Southern pea family, which includes black-eye, crowder and purple hull. Creamer peas are lighter in color than any of the other “cousins” and I find them to be lighter in taste as well. They have a lovely smooth texture that doesn’t become mushy when cooked. While you can buy them in the pods, it is infinitely easier to pay the farmer to shell them. Get an extra bag and stash it in the freezer as is, for up to three months. Double bag your peas if you want them to last longer without developing freezer burn. Cook frozen peas as you would fresh, but be aware that the texture is not going to be as smooth or creamy as fresh peas.

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We would like to congratulate 441 Market COO Jared Sweat on his Master's Degree, and thank him for all of his contributions to the farmers and customers of the Alachua County Farmers Market.

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Tricks and Tips

This dish can serve as a dessert or a decadent breakfast entrée.

While plain bread will do, you get amazing results with a good raisin or breakfast bread. Loaf shaped bread is preferred so that 4 slices can fit neatly into an 8x8 pan with the "custard" mixture. Crusty loaves do not work as well since there is not a long soaking period to soften the crust.

Stuffed and Baked French Toast

INGREDIENTS

- 4 thick (1 1/2–2 inch) slices of high quality bread, preferably loaf-shaped and somewhat stale
- 4 ounces cream cheese, mascarpone or whole milk ricotta
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1/2 cup good quality jam
- 2 teaspoons butter, divided

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Use 1 teaspoon of butter to lightly grease 8x8 pan.

Slice a pocket into each slice of bread, cutting through from the bottom and leaving bread connected on three sides. Gently open the pocket and spread one ounce of cream cheese evenly inside the bread. (Although putting jam *in* the pocket seems like a good idea, it leaks.)

In a shallow bowl, beat together eggs and milk. Dip each stuffed bread slice into the "custard" mixture, flipping once to coat both sides. Place into prepared pan, fitting the pieces in one layer. Pour remaining custard on top of slices—the pan may be very full. Cover with an even layer of jam and dot with bits of butter.

Bake uncovered until completely set—about 45-55 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes before serving. Cover and refrigerate any leftovers.