

HOW TO MAKE JAMS AND PRESERVES.



“DO you intend to make much jam this year, mamma?” said Bertha.

“I should like to make our usual quantity,” I answered. “It is convenient to have a supply in the house. I scarcely know what we should do without it, and the flavour of good home-made jam is infinitely superior to many which are bought at the shops.”

“Ada Thompson’s mother says she thinks it extravagant to make jam, because so much more is used than there would be if it had to be bought,” said Bertha.

“That is doubtless true,” I answered. “Still, if jam is judiciously used it saves other things, and so prevents expense in the long run. It *must* be judiciously used, though. If it is ‘run at,’ it is very expensive. It is in order to assist us in using it carefully that I have the jam put into such small jars and glasses.”

“I know,” said Bertha. “You think if a jar is once opened it is sure to get finished, and so it had better be a small jar than a large one. Mamma, I want to ask you a favour.”

“What is it, dear?”

“I want you to let me make the jam this year. I have not much idea how to set about it, because I have always been at school during the fruit season; but if you will tell me how to do it, I can learn.”

“And will you not require my valuable assistance?” said Frank, who had been sitting near us, reading intently as we thought, but who now suddenly joined in the conversation.

“Oh,” said Bertha, “you will do nothing but taste the fruit to find out if it has the proper flavour. Both mother and I know you of old.”

“I will do more than that for you,” said Frank. “I will taste the fruit, and pronounce an opinion about it, both before and after it has been boiled; and if there is any spoilt, I will engage to finish it myself without assistance.”

“That means that you think I shall succeed with the jam. Thank you, Frank, for the compliment. Mamma, do you agree?”

“Yes, dear, I agree very gladly. I shall be much pleased for you to know how to preserve fruit, and this knowledge you can only gain by experience; besides which, I shall be very glad to be spared the trouble of looking after it myself. I shall be in the house, so that you can come to me if there is any difficulty to which you feel yourself unequal; and I will give you full directions about everything that I can think of, that you need to know. What do you say to this?”

“I think it is quite right, mamma. Can I begin at once to do something towards it?”

“Yes, you can collect together everything you will require; have all put into proper order, and laid in a convenient place. First, there is the preserving-pan. Ours, as you know, is a large, broad, shallow pan, with a handle at each side. It must be made scrupulously clean and bright inside with sand. Eliza will do this for you. I know it is said by some persons that a brass pan is very objectionable; but still I have used this one for years, and have found it answer my purpose excellently.”

“I expect,” said Bertha, “the idea that a brass pan is dangerous was at first only a fanciful crotchet of some persons who had not got one.”

“It is more than that. Carelessly used, a brass pan makes the fruit very unwholesome; and decidedly the best pan that can be used is an enamelled pan, on which the acid produces no effect, and which does not spoil the colour of the fruit as a block-tin pan would do. This enamelled pan, however, we have not got, and we must make the best of what we have. To do this we must have our brass pan thoroughly clean to begin with, we must have it cleaned afresh every time it is emptied, and we must not let the fruit stand in it off the fire.”

“So much for the pan,” said Bertha. “Now what else?”

“The jars and bottles must be collected. They were put away perfectly clean, so that they will only need to be rubbed till bright with a soft dry cloth. Every cracked jar must be rejected. I suppose you know that the jars must be perfectly dry, or the jam will not keep. You will find jars of both glass and earthenware in the glass cupboard. I like those made of glass the best, because we can see through them whether or not the jam is keeping properly. When earthenware is used, the jam needs to be opened and examined two or three times during the first two months. If it does not seem likely to keep, it must be boiled over again.”

“Do you open every jar, mamma, two or three times to see if the jam is all right?”

“No, dear; I only open one of each kind. It has very seldom happened that I have had to boil the fruit again; but it is always best to look at it, and be sure it is right. Then you will need two wooden spoons. (Tin, iron, or pewter spoons must never be used; they would spoil both the colour and flavour of the fruit.) A fine hair-sieve, too, will be wanted, and

you will find one in the cupboard which has been kept exclusively for fruit. Then if you have two muslin strainers, a jelly bag, a small jug for emptying out the fruit, and the scales and weights, I think you will be provided with tools for your work."

"I had no idea so many things were needed," said Bertha. In a moment she added, "Will you excuse me for a minute, mamma? I saw Ada Thompson pass the window, and she is coming here. Will you tell her how to preserve fruit as well as me, and will you let her help me in doing it? I know she would like to do so, and 'it would be so much more fun with her than it would be having it all to myself."

"Bertha likes so much to get 'fun' out of everything," said Frank, as his sister left the room.

"And a very good thing too," said I. "People never do anything so well as when they thoroughly enjoy doing it."

"I have told Ada about the pots and pans, mamma," said Bertha on her return. "Please go on."

"Very well. After the 'pots and pans,' as you call them, the next thing to be provided is the sugar. And here let me impress upon you the desirability of using well-refined sugar for jam. The difference in the immediate cost is very little, and is more than made up in the larger quantity of scum which inferior sugar throws up, compared to that which rises from the best sugar. It is a mistake, too, to use other than the proper quantity of sugar required."

"I suppose, then, you always take a pound of sugar to a pound of fruit?" said Ada.

"No, indeed, I could not lay down any rule like that. The weight of the sugar necessarily varies with the nature and acidity of the fruit. If too little is used, the fruit will not keep. If too much is used, the flavour of the fruit will be lost. Sometimes, for economy's sake, people think they will use a small quantity of sugar; but they gain nothing by it they only have to boil the fruit longer before it will stiffen."

"And so what they save boils away," said Bertha.

"I don't see why they should not take it off the fire a little sooner," said Ada. "It would not boil away if they did that."

"They would lose it more decidedly still, for it would not keep. Ordinary jam should never be taken off the fire until it will 'set,' or stiffen, when a small quantity is put upon a plate. It is scarcely possible, therefore, to say how long jam must be boiled; and when the attempt to do this is made, you should understand that the *probable* time only is meant; and the jam must be taken off earlier or boiled longer than the time specified, according to its condition. You must remember, too, that the time is always calculated from the moment that the jam boils equally all over. But to return to the sugar."

"I thought the sugar was done with," said Bertha.

"There is not much more to be said about it. The sugar should not be in powder, because that would make the jam thick and turbid-looking; and it should not be in large lumps, because it would be so long in dissolving. It should be broken up into small pieces, and should be dried in the front of the fire before it is

put with the fruit. Another most important thing to remember in boiling fruit with sugar is that the fruit should be put in first, and should be boiled gently alone till it breaks, then quickly for a short time till it is slightly reduced. The sugar should then be added, the scum removed, and the jam boiled and stirred gently till it is done enough. When this plan is adopted the flavour of the fruit is retained, and the colour of the jam is better than when fruit and sugar are put in together."

"Please wait a minute," said Ada. "I must tell you something. Last summer I spent a few weeks with a friend of mother's, who had married a German. You have heard me talk of Mrs. Diehl, Bertha. They were just going to boil some greengages, and Mrs. Diehl said, 'I shall have them done the German way.' Of course I said, 'What is that?' and she said, 'The fruit is picked and weighed, and the requisite quantity of sugar taken. The sugar is then broken up into large lumps, and each lump is dipped quickly and separately into cold water, and then popped into the preserving-pan. Then it is put on to boil, and the syrup has to be watched for fear it boils over. It is stirred whenever it begins to rise, and simmered gently till it forms little beads. The fruit is then put in, and boiled for a sufficient time.'"

"What do you think of that plan, mamma?" said Bertha.

"I think it is excellent for choice delicate preserves, but for ordinary jams the old plan is the best."

"Now for the fruit, mamma," said Bertha.

"Yes, now for the fruit. It should be gathered in dry weather, and, if possible, when the dew is not upon it. It should be free from dust, and ripe, full-flavoured, and quite sound. All bruised and decayed fruit should be rejected."

"Only the greengrocer can tell when the fruit was gathered," said Ada.

"I don't suppose mamma would buy hers of the greengrocer," said Bertha. "You would get it from the old gardener, would you not, mamma?"

"Yes; I have got it from him for several years, and I have always found he treats me very fairly."

"And do you think it foolish to get it from a greengrocer?" said Ada.

"Oh dear, no! I think nothing of the kind. When you have no knowledge of a convenient old gardener, and have no friends in the country, and live at some distance from a large market, what can you do but get fruit from the greengrocer? A quantity can generally be bought cheaply, especially if the fruit is ordered a little before it is wanted, and during settled fine weather. The only recommendation I can give you about buying fruit is, to keep your eyes open and use your common-sense. Generally, jam is expensive or inexpensive according to the price of the fruit, and this varies so much in different localities, and from one season to another, that I can give you no established rule, excepting this—that unsound fruit gathered in damp weather would be dear at any price."

"Once mamma got up at three o'clock, and went to the market in the town where she lived," said

Ada. "She bought a quantity of fruit very cheaply; but she said that she was so tired with the effort that she wished she had bought it in the regular way, and let the greengrocer have the penny or twopence a pound that she saved."

"Very likely. To quote an old man I knew when I was a girl, 'It takes a good many things to make up the "all things."' If you deal with honest people, and are content to pay a fair price for good sound fruit, you will not be very far wrong."

"Now I think we know everything," said Bertha; "let us begin."

"No, not quite everything yet, Bertha. I must tell you about the fire. We have no stove, you know, and must therefore make the best of our ordinary range. The fire must be bright and clear; not too fierce, or it will burn the fruit; not too gentle, or the fruit will be so long boiling. The pan must never be placed flat upon the fire, but either hung on a trivet or placed on the lowered bar. If it were put flat on the coals the fruit would be sure to burn."

"Now, what fruit shall we boil?" said Bertha. "Wait a moment, mamma. Ada, let us each take some paper and a pencil. We will choose the kind of jam we want to make. Mamma shall tell us the quantity of sugar required, and all about it, and we will put it down."

"I beg to propose gooseberry jam," said Frank.

"Very well; it shall be first. The hairy red gooseberries are the best for preserving. Cut off the tops and tails, weigh the fruit, and for every four pounds of fruit allow three pounds of sugar. Boil the fruit till it is broken. Add the sugar, remove the scum, and boil the fruit again until the jam will set. A pint of red or even black-currant juice put with every four pounds of gooseberries is a great improvement; or a pint of raspberries may be put in instead. The same directions may be followed for raspberries and strawberries, raspberries and red currants, strawberries and red currants, and in each case four pounds of fruit will require three pounds of sugar. The strawberries, raspberries, and red currants will not need to be boiled so long as the gooseberries before the sugar is added."

"I like strawberries preserved whole," said Ada.

"Ah! that is a delicate preserve, and wants care. Take equal weights of fruit and loaf sugar. Boil the sugar to syrup, as Ada's German friend recommended, and let it simmer gently until beads form on the surface. Put the fruit gently in, and add a pint of red-currant juice for each pound of fruit. Let all *boil* for five minutes, then lift the strawberries into jars, boil the syrup a few minutes longer, and pour it over them. Strawberries preserved in this way are delicious in flavour and of a good colour, but they will not keep for any length of time. When they are wanted to keep, say twelve months, it will be better to adopt the following plan:—Take a pint of red-currant juice and one pound and a half of loaf sugar to each pound of strawberries. Pick the fruit, which must not be *very* ripe, and put it in layers on a flat dish, with half the quantity of sugar in powder sprinkled over and about it. Let it remain for twenty-four hours, and shake the dish occasionally

that the sugar may touch the under side of the fruit. Boil the red-currant juice with the remainder of the sugar till it forms a thin syrup. Put the strawberries gently into this, and simmer them very slowly for about twenty minutes, and remember to lift them out earlier if they seem likely to break. Put them carefully into jars, pour the juice over them, and when they are cold, cover them in the usual way."

"What is the usual way?" said Ada.

"Oh, you know that," said Bertha. "Lay brandied papers upon them, and paste paper over the jars to keep out the air."

"You may either paste papers over them," said I, "or lay papers upon them which have been dipped in white of egg or gum-water. The object is to keep out the air. I had some friends who lived in a damp country place, and they used to pour melted mutton fat over the brandied papers. Now, what is the next fruit required?"

"I should say red-currant jam," said Bertha.

"Before you say anything about red-currant jam, I should like to ask a question," said Ada. "How are you to get the red-currant juice for the strawberries and the gooseberries?"

"That is a very sensible question, Ada," said I. "Take very ripe currants, strip the stalks from them, put them into a jar and cover them closely. Set this jar in a saucepan three-parts filled with cold water; put this on the fire, and let it simmer gently till the juice flows freely. Keep pouring it off as it exudes, and cover the jar again, until no more juice can be drawn out. The juice of all fruit is obtained in the same way."

"Now for the red-currant jam. This may be boiled in two ways. 1st. Pick the fruit and weigh it. Boil the fruit first, and stir it till the juice flows freely; add its weight in sugar, and stir and skim it till it will set. It will need to boil a quarter of an hour without the fruit, and three-quarters of an hour with it. 2nd. Take fine fruit fully ripe. Strip it from the stalks, weigh it, and add an equal weight of loaf sugar. Put them in the preserving-pan, stir unceasingly, and boil the jam quickly eight minutes from the time it boils equally all over. Turn it into jars and cover it."

"Will that jam keep, mamma?" said Bertha."

"I don't know whether you remember *Punch's* recipe for making jam keep. It is, 'Keep it out of the reach of children.' I have never been able to follow that advice for any length of time, but I can testify that it will keep for twelve months. I have boiled red currants, and white currants too, for eighteen years in this way, and I always found that it would keep as long as the children would let it. Now, what next?"

"Rhubarb jam," said Ada. "I should think that is cheap and wholesome enough."

"It is a capital jam for family use, but it needs to be quickly used, for I never made any that would keep longer than five or six months. I have been told, however, within the last six weeks, that if rhubarb is stewed without water, and the juice that flows from it is poured off, and the pulp boiled afterwards with sugar, it will keep as well as other jam. I have never

tried this, so I cannot answer for it. I have done it as follows:—Pare the rhubarb, cut it into thin slices, and weigh it. Boil it gently till it begins to soften, and stir it occasionally to keep it from burning. Half an ounce of bitter almonds and the finely-minced rind of half a lemon may be boiled with each pound and a quarter of fruit. Add the sugar (one pound for a pound and a quarter of fruit), and boil all gently together till the jam will set when a little is put upon a plate. If preferred, the almonds can be omitted, and the rhubarb may be boiled with the rind and juice of a lemon, or with candied peel.”

“Please don't forget apple jam,” said Frank. “I think that is simply delicious.”

“We won't forget apple jam, and we must not forget my favourite jam, blackberry and apple.”

“I never tasted that,” said Ada.

“No, I don't think it is very common. For apple jam, choose apples that will fall easily, and weigh them after they are pared, cored, and thinly sliced. Put the apples in a jar with the strained juice and grated rind of half a lemon to each pound of fruit. Set the jar in a kettle of boiling water, and keep it simmering gently till the apples are soft. Put the pulp into a preserving-pan with three pounds of sugar to four pounds of fruit. Stir the jam and skim it, and let it simmer for half an hour from the time it boils all over. For blackberry and apple jam, soften the apples in the same way, omitting the lemon juice and rind. Put them into a preserving-pan with an equal weight of blackberries, stir all gently till the blackberries fall, then add three pounds of sugar to four pounds of fruit, and boil till the jam will set. Last year I varied this, and put half a tea-cupful of water with each pound of fruit, and then allowed an equal weight of sugar.”

“I liked it better that way,” said Bertha. “Mamma, you must not forget black-currant jam. Remember coughs and colds and horrors of that kind.”

“Nor yet papa's favourite plum jam,” said I. “However, I think I have almost given you as many recipes as you children will manage this year. For black-currant jam, take the fruit when it is fully ripe, strip the stalks from it, and weigh it. Put it into a preserving-pan with half a tea-cupful of water to each pound of fruit. Let it boil for ten minutes, then add a pound of sugar for each pound of fruit, and stir the jam to keep it from burning, till it will set when a little is put upon a plate. If preferred, the water can be omitted, and the jam boiled with three-quarters of a pound of sugar to each pound of fruit, but it will not then be so suitable for making black-currant tea. Black-currant jam must be watched and stirred carefully, because, owing to the thickness of the juice, it burns quickly. Speaking of the juice reminds me that I must tell you how to make red and black-currant or any other fruit jelly. Draw out the juice and strain it twice; do not squeeze the bag. With each pint put a pound and a half of refined white sugar. When this is dissolved, pour the liquor into a preserving-pan, and boil it rather quickly, stirring and skimming it all the time.

till it is quite clear. Pour it into jars, and when cold, cover it in the usual way. It will need to boil from thirty to forty minutes. As to plum jam, there are so many kinds that one recipe can scarcely be given for all. The quantity of sugar used must be regulated by the nature of the fruit. Some plums might be advantageously boiled in the way Ada's German friend recommends. For ordinary plums, allow three pounds of sugar to four pounds of fruit, weighed before it is stoned. Divide the plums into halves, take out the stones, and lay the fruit on a dish with the sugar sprinkled upon it. Let it lie for twenty-four hours; then turn the whole into a preserving-pan, and simmer all gently together for half an hour; then boil it quickly till it will set. Skim it carefully and stir it constantly, as it will quickly burn. Add one-eighth of the kernels, blanched, five minutes before the jam is taken from the fire.”

“Should jam be covered over directly it is poured out?” said Ada.

“No; it is better to let it remain until the following day. To finish the jam neatly when you have made it, you should, after it is covered, paste a label on the front of each jar, on which should be clearly written the name of the jam, and the date of its manufacture. This would be a guide to you for future operations. Now, if you will put up your notes we will walk to the gardener's and buy the fruit.”

As we walked along, Bertha said—

“Mamma, we will not keep the jam in the same closet that we did last year. I am quite sure it was damp.”

“I think so too, Bertha. You may make jam perfectly, and your labour will be lost if you cannot keep it in a cool, dry place. If it is kept in a closet, the door should be opened frequently that the air may blow upon the jars. If they are put in a hot place, the fruit will ferment; in a cold one, it will get mouldy. So we must remember that this is a very important point.”

The fruit was bought, and the two girls commenced operations. They worked hard, were very happy over their work, and very successful. Ada came to me in great dismay the first day, out of breath, and almost in tears, for she said that Bertha had a large panful of fruit on the fire, and it was going to boil over, and they could not lift it off because it was so heavy, and the fruit splashed them so. I ran down quickly, but found that Eliza had come to the rescue before me. I advised them, for the future, on no account to put more fresh fruit into the pan than would two-thirds fill it, and with very juicy fruit, half fill it; and when they did this they had no more difficulty. When all was done, papa and Frank were called upon to taste the jam and pronounce an opinion upon it; but it was found that they needed to take such a goodly portion before they could pass judgment, that we were compelled to rescue it from them; and Bertha declared that, among her rules for keeping jam, she should record as the most important one, “Keep it out of the reach of the grown-ups.”

PHILLIS BROWNE.