

Membrillo

Aka quince cheese, membrillate (Spanish), cotognato (Italian), pate de coings (French) and marmelata (Portuguese), this has to be one of my favourite things to do with quinces. It is the classic accompaniment for manchego cheese, but also very good with aged cheddar.

The trick is to avoid graininess, a common flaw. Quinces have tiny rock-hard grains in their cores, which will pass through just about any sieve. Most recipes tell you to cook whole quinces then blitz and sieve the lot, but this results in grainy membrillo. So remove the cores before or after boiling the quinces. I prefer after, as a) cutting cores out of raw, hard quinces is tricky, and one of these days I will slice right into my hand, and b) the cores and pips help add colour and pectin, so better to leave them in until just before you sieve.



The other tip is to add some acidity in the form of lemon juice or tartaric acid, to balance all that sweetness.

2kg quinces

a couple of bay leaves, strips of lemon zest, split vanilla pods and/or small cinnamon sticks (optional)

white granulated sugar

2 large lemons

glycerine or almond oil for greasing moulds

food-grade paraffin wax

1. Scrub quinces clean, removing all the fuzz. Cut into quarters lengthwise and place in a large saucepan with enough water to just cover and several squeezes of lemon juice. Add bay/zest/vanilla/cinnamon if using. Cover and bring to a simmer. Cook until quinces are very soft and pink, up to two hours. Let cool. Drain quinces, reserving the liquid and discarding the flavourings. Sieve the liquid and set aside.
2. Cut cores out of quinces, being sure to get all the grainy parts, and discard. Push quinces through a sieve or mouli. Weigh the resulting pulp and add an equal weight of the reserved cooking liquid. (If there isn't quite enough, don't worry.) Place in a large preserving pan and mix to combine.
3. Heat until simmering and then add sugar equal in weight to the combined weight of quince pulp and juice. Stir to dissolve and then continue cooking, stirring frequently, until really thick. Note that this can be quite hazardous – the hot bubbling mixture will spit at you, so wrap your stirring arm in a tea towel to avoid burns. This will take an hour or longer. Take care that the membrillo does not burn at the bottom. Towards the end taste and add more lemon juice if it needs more acidity.
4. You now have two options:

- a. Pour hot membrillo into sterilised ramekins greased with a little glycerine or almond oil. While still hot, pour over enough melted paraffin wax to cover, then let cool undisturbed. Glycerine and food-grade paraffin wax pellets are available from www.soapkitchenonline.co.uk Your sealed pots will keep at cool room temperature, out of the sun, for a year or longer.



- b. Line a rimmed baking tray with greaseproof paper, and pour in membrillo. Let sit to dry overnight, then flip over to dry the other side. If weather is too humid or you don't have enough time, place the baking tray in a very low oven (60C) for an hour or so to dry. Cut membrillo into sections, wrap in greaseproof paper and consume within a couple of weeks, or store in the fridge.