

## Mum's marmalade

*When I was 4, my dad gave my mother 'The Times Cookery Book' by Katie Stewart for Christmas, doubtlessly not for entirely altruistic reasons. She's been making Katie's marmalade every January since. The house being filled with the sweet-sour aromas of Seville oranges cooking in their own syrup is a favourite childhood memory. Mum's excellent 2008 vintage prompted me to write it up, complete with her own and Katie's tips.*



Makes: approx 8 450g (1lb) jars

Time: 2 hours

1kg 350g (3 lbs) Seville oranges

2 ¼ litres + ¼ litre (4 pints + ½ pint) water

approx 2kg (4-5 lbs) granulated white sugar

juice of 2 lemons

2 tbsps dark treacle

generous knob of butter

1. Make sure you have at least 8 clean and dry jam jars. (Sterilise them by running through the dishwasher or boiling them in water for 10 mins.) Also, put a couple of saucers in the fridge.
2. Scrub oranges and place in a very large (it should be both wide and deep) saucepan with 2¼ litres (4 pints) water. Cover and simmer for 1 hour or until very soft. To test: Try pushing the head of a pin into an orange – it should slide in quite effortlessly.
3. Lift out oranges, reserving the water they were in. Cut each in half and use a metal spoon to scoop flesh and as much pith as possible out into a 2<sup>nd</sup> saucepan.
4. Add ¼ litre (½ pint) water to the pulp in the 2<sup>nd</sup> pan, bring to a boil and simmer for 10 mins, stirring occasionally if needed to prevent it catching on the bottom.
5. Transfer reserved liquid from 1<sup>st</sup> pan to a large bowl. Chop orange peels into small pieces and add to bowl.
6. Measure contents of bowl as you transfer it all back into the large saucepan. Then, for every 570ml (1 pint) of peel and juice mix, add 450g (1 lb) sugar. Also add lemon juice and treacle.
7. Now strain contents of 2<sup>nd</sup> pan into the 1<sup>st</sup> pan, using a fine-meshed sieve. Gently encourage it with the back of a spoon but don't hurry it. Discard contents of the sieve. (Or, if you think more juice is yet to come out, set sieve over a bowl and leave to drip, then add drippings to the mixture a bit

later. This is where the pectin comes from, which will set the marmalade, so you need it all!)

8. Heat the mix very gently, stirring slowly all the while, until you can see the sugar is completely dissolved. This is important, or the sugar will later re-crystallise and your marmalade will be crunchy. To be extra safe, you can periodically wash down the sides of the pan with a little water, using a pastry brush, as it is around the edges where there is most danger of sugar re-crystallising.
9. Once sugar has dissolved, crank up the heat, bring mix to a boil and boil fast for 15 or more mins, until the 'setting point' is reached. It may take much longer than 15 mins. To test: Take pan off the heat, put a small amount of syrup onto one of your pre-chilled saucers, leave it for a few mins, then push it with your finger to see if the surface has set. It should wrinkle. If it doesn't, return pan to the heat and test again in 5 mins.
10. Once setting point has been reached, take pan off heat, stir in butter and then leave to cool slightly for 15-20 mins. Meanwhile, place your jars in a low oven to warm up.
11. Ladle marmalade carefully into warmed jars and seal immediately. Label when cold. Frilly tops optional.

#### Marmalade facts:

- '*Marie est malade*' is the unprobable root of '*marmalade*', being the phrase uttered by Mary Queen of Scots' French staff (she was briefly married to the eldest son of the king of France) when she was under the weather and craving her favourite restorative - orange jam. Indeed, Scotland lays claim to being the birthplace of modern marmalade as we know it: The Keiller family in Dundee (supposedly) developed the first recipe using Seville oranges, having bought a huge quantity from a Spanish ship only to find them unsellable in their raw, sour state, and then built the first marmalade factory in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. (The marmalade in this recipe, despite my mother's Scottish ancestry and upbringing, is more in the 'Oxford style' than the Scottish, being thicker-cut and darker.)
- '*Mermelada*', on the other hand, is the infinitely more probable root, being the Portuguese word for quince jam, which in turn came from the Greek '*melimelon*' - fruit preserves, including marmalade. The historical verbal confusion between quinces and oranges seem due to the ancient generic words '*malum*' (Latin) and '*melon*' (Greek) which meant any fruit with pips. (I don't recommend delving too deeply in this - it gets very confusing.) In any case, somewhere between Greece, Portugal and Scotland, sometime between the 4<sup>th</sup> century (when a guy called Palladius recorded a recipe for quince jam) and the 18<sup>th</sup> century (when Janet Keiller got out her copper pans) the quinces became replaced with sour oranges, and orange marmalade was born. It almost certainly happened in several places and at several times, with the invention and accessibility of refined sugar playing a major role in the evolution of jam as we know it.
- Sour oranges, such as the Seville orange, work so well due to their high pectin content, essential for gelling the jam, and distinctive bitter flavour.

These originated in southeastern China and later became popular in the Arabian empire, through which they spread around the Middle East and Mediterranean, as far as Spain, which remains a main production area. Sweet oranges reached Europe some 400 years later, around 1500. Incidentally, Christian Europe was initially uneasy with the Islamic orange, and steps were taken to 'christianise' it – various monks and archbishops purposefully planted it in their gardens, and it was later adopted as a Christmas decoration.

- The Seville and other bitter oranges are used for making neroli oil, orange flower water, bergamot oil, orange bitters, liqueurs such as Cointreau and various Chinese medicines. In fact, now (January/February) is the perfect time to make a batch of orange bitters with which to spice up your cocktails for the rest of the year...
- So why boil the oranges first when making marmalade? The water dissolves the bitter molecules in the pith. Hot water simply does this much faster than cold water. The wonderful zesty orange flavours and aromas are not lost, as those molecules are largely not water-soluble. Very clever.
- There's no need to limit your marmalade to your breakfast toast. It's great in bread and butter pudding, on steamed puddings and cakes, as a glaze for meats (ham, chicken and duck, for example), in ice cream, and even in cocktails (Bourbon & Branch in San Francisco make a sublime marmalade whisky sour).
- But just be careful what you call marmalade. Despite the fact the word 'marmalade' is very similar to several European words simply meaning 'jam', if you try to sell a non-citrus 'marmalade' you'll be breaking EU regulations. You can probably guess whose influence got this passed, and imagine how this aided their popularity within the Union.

Sources:

*Citrus*, Pierre Laszlo, 2007

*Food Plants of the World*, Ben-Erik van Wyk, 2005

*On Food and Cooking*, Harold McGee, 1984

[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

