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## harvest recipes for your garden's bounty

Posted in All Gardening Advice, Vegetables and Fruit, September on 1st September 2019

Make the most of this year's bumper harvest and line your larder with jars and bottles of delicious autumn bounty.

I'm sure I was a peasant in an earlier life, as there is nothing I like better than spending a day picking fruit and veg with a friend or two, all of us harvesting then storing away the produce we've picked – a few hours of chatting, stirring, steaming, bottling and freezing.

Within a couple of hours, the greenhouse table looks like a harvest festival, with fresh food piling up through the morning, basket after basket coming in. That's the way I like to do it – in one great preserving day, not in dribs and drabs but a few steamy hours packed with bottles, jars, pots and pans, and the cupboards quickly filling.

Vegetable gardens and allotments around Britain are awash with food this autumn. With the unusual number of sunny days we've had since June, it's a bumper harvest, and after the cold of last winter and spring, most produce is at least three weeks behind, so we're now hitting the peak.

Runner beans are elongating over their frames, growing Jack and the Beanstalk-like at 2ft a week – mine are now at least twice as tall as me. Courgettes are ballooning to marrows and tomatoes are going at full tilt, some ripening and dropping off the vine before I get to them. Most of the herbs are beginning to look tired, with stems running up to flower. The tassels of sweetcorn are browned; squash skins are starting to harden and turn that deeper colour so they're safe to store; and I have plums, figs, apples, pears and raspberries waiting to be picked off their bushes and trees.

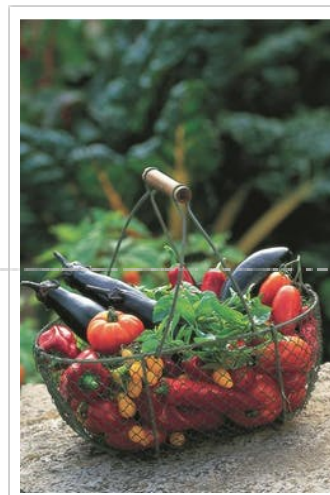
That's in the cultivated patch, and then there are the rowans, brambles, crab apples and, if you're lucky, damsons in the hedgerows and woods. So it is time to stash produce away to eat in the leaner months when the weather is cold and grey.

You can make chutneys, jams (savoury and sweet), jellies, flavoured oils, vinegars and cordials, as well as blanching for the freezer. With the nights now quite cold (I could see my breath last night when I locked the chickens away), it's getting urgent. Growth curves are flattening and plants such as basil and tomatoes will go black overnight if temperatures fall much more. As a basil grower once told me, if you're no longer happy to have supper in the garden because it's too cold, then basil and tomatoes won't be happy out there either. That's the moment when you know you have to get your produce in.

If you don't have a veg garden, visit your local pick-your-own. It will be dripping with produce right now too.

### General notes for jams, jellies and chutneys

- Preserving pan Regular stirring in a good heavy-based pan is essential for all preserve making. With chutneys in particular, you need to keep an eye out so they don't burn and catch on the bottom of the pan.
- Setting point With all your jellies/jams, you'll need to pull the pan off the heat and test for setting point. As you start to cook, put a saucer in the fridge. When you think your jelly is ready, take the saucer from the fridge and place a teaspoonful of the juice on it. When cool, it should wrinkle when you push it with your finger. You could also use a jam thermometer: when it reaches 105°C-106°C the jelly/jam will set.
- Sterilising your jars To sterilise the jars, run them through on the hottest cycle on your dishwasher or wash thoroughly in very hot, soapy water. Rinse in very hot water then put on a baking sheet in a 140°C / fan



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120°C / 275°F / gas 1 oven until completely dry.

- Bottling Once you have bottled, cover with a wax disc, then seal and label with the date.

## RECIPES

For great preserving ideas, visit our Recipes page and try searching for 'jam', 'jelly', 'chutney' ... Some favourite include:

- Rowan and apple jelly
- Ratatouille chutney
- Three-day raspberry jam
- Chilli and tomato jam
- Rose-geranium and lemon cordial
- Tarragon vinegar
- Pure apple juice
- Beetroot and squash relish
- Blackberry and apple gin

*This article first appeared in The Telegraph, 18th September 2013.*

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