

Review: *Salt Sugar Smoke*

ANDREA MYNARD is inspired by Diana Henry to preserve her gluts in deliciously exotic ways

DIANA HENRY explores the theme of preserving everything from vegetables to meat, fish, fruit, flowers and herbs in her latest book. It includes recipes for potted fish, jams, charcuteries, pickled vegetables, cordials, chutneys and relishes, showing how we can prolong the life of our produce. Yet it's much more than a cookbook. With practical ideas on what equipment to buy (aimed very much at the home cook) Diana recommends an Ikea storage box for brining, explains how to troubleshoot problems and notes how other cultures preserve their gluts – from Persian pickles to Indian achar.



Whether describing how to make a country pork terrine (pictured) – “messy but rewarding cooking and feeds a lot of people at one time”, a deliciously soft set raspberry and violet jam or quince ratafia, Diana’s ideas about gathering, foraging, preserving, saving and storing fit perfectly with a smallholder’s life.

Her recipes often seem to me to suggest wonderful ways of adding glamour to homegrown produce. I wouldn’t have thought this could be possible with root veg but Diana’s “Middle Eastern pickled turnips” look spectacularly exotic with beetroot juice adding a gloriously pink hue. Transforming English quinces or mulberries into a sharbat (Middle Eastern cordial) sounds similarly enticing, while the Scandinavian ideas for salt-curing “in coolness, in silence and in shadow” include beetroot-cured gravlax and demonstrate Diana’s view that the Scandinavians “are so brilliant at bringing the countryside to their plates – using dill, you feel so much as if you’ve been walking through a pine forest”.



Diana herself lives in north London but when she told me that she grew up in rural Northern Ireland in a farming family, it wasn’t a surprise. She admitted that she “would really love to have an orchard with greengages, damsons, medlars. She said: “Most of the children I went to school with had farmers as parents, and although everyone talks about foraging being fashionable now, it just seemed to us very wasteful to not make use of the rosehips and blackberries growing wild. People in agricultural areas really know about food, we knew what potatoes were in season, what was good, and understood about cuts of meat.”

Now her laundry room is stacked up to the

ceiling with preserves, pickles and cordials squeezing in between the washing powder and brooms. Diana isn’t precious about her jewel-coloured jars of delicious goodies. She gives preserves away to friends all the time, with her pear liqueur and date and apple chutney in particular demand. In return, neighbours seem to regularly turn up with gluts of quinces or damsons from their gardens – even roses. Diana said: “It’s amazing what you can find if you ask people – they love it, food connects people.”

As in *Crazy Water*, *Pickled Lemons*, roses and rosewater add an Arabian night’s exoticism to rhubarb, rose and cardamom jam, rose petal jelly and rose syrup. Keen to grow more roses for the fragrance they’ll add to my garden and kitchen, I asked Diana which ones she’d recommend for preserves. Both poetic and down to earth in her food writing, her answer was typically grounded: “Old-fashioned blowsy ones have a better fragrance. I just go around sticking my nose in them.”

Inspired to experiment as Diana recommends with different coloured rose petals (scarlet, red, pink, pink, yellow or golden) in my cooking, I’m keen to grow bergamot to add to apples for delectable jams and jellies. And *Salt Sugar Smoke* has definitely left me with so many exciting yet frugal ideas for injecting exoticism and loveliness into my larder – and life.

Diana said: “One of the good constituents of a good life is the ability to find pleasure in small things. A good jam for your toast in the morning. A chutney that is made from the apples you gathered last autumn. Cutting salt beef that you’ve made and can feed a dozen friends.” ■

■ **To follow Andrea Mynard’s blog visit www.shabbychick.me.uk**

■ ***Salt Sugar Smoke* by Diana Henry is published by Mitchell Beazley. For further information visit www.octopusbooks.co.uk**

Raspberry and violet jam

RASPBERRY jam is one of the most delicious. Turning raspberries into jam intensifies their flavour and, as they have a whiff of the flower, violet is a perfect addition.



I don’t like it too sweet so I don’t add the traditional quantity of sugar.

(I also use sugar with added pectin; raspberries are low in pectin so it isn’t easy to get a set). I try to catch it at the optimum point. I love a soft set but don’t want a coulis. With practice you get to judge when the jam is ready.

Once opened, keep this in the refrigerator. For an easier life, use equal quantities of sugar and fruit, but I think this gives a “boiled sweet” flavour. You can add more violet syrup or liqueur

Ingredients

- Fills 10 x 225g (8oz) jars
- 1.5kg (3lb 5oz) raspberries.
- 1kg (2lb 4oz) granulated sugar with pectin (“jam sugar”).
- Juice of one lemon
- 75ml (2¾fl oz) violet syrup or violet liqueur.

Method

- Put the raspberries into a preserving pan with the sugar and lemon juice.
- Gently heat, stirring to help the sugar dissolve. Once it has dissolved, whack the heat up and bring to a boil. Boil steadily until the setting point is reached.
- Stir in the violet syrup. Cool for 12 minutes so the seeds distribute evenly.
- Pot in warm, dry sterilised jars, cover with waxed paper discs and seal. This keeps for a year; refrigerate once opened.

Taken from Salt Sugar Smoke by Diana Henry and published by Mitchell Beazley. Photographs by Laura Edwards.