

Conserves, Butters and Marmalade
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If plain old jams and jellies on the morning toast just seem boring, take things up a notch and try some conserves, butters or marmalade. These combination products mix the flavors of various fruits with interesting textures and unusual spices, sometimes adding nuts, to produce a tasty treat. Though all of these products wake up sleepy taste buds, the characteristics of each type of fruit spread remain unique.

Conserves usually contain more than one fruit, nuts, raisins and perhaps coconut. Frequently substituted for jam, the spreadable conserve adds a chunky texture to accompany compatible foods. Delicious spices such as ginger, cinnamon and cloves may also be added to conserves to perk up the various flavors.

Easily spreading fruit butters require combining cooked, pureed fruit, spices and sugar and heating all of these together until the mixture thickens. Fruit butters remain thick when cold, and may be spread wherever a burst of fruit flavor will enhance an otherwise unexciting food. Apples make a fine butter, but other fruits such as strawberries, apricots and peaches cook up just as deliciously.

Marmalades contain small pieces of fruit and fruit peel which hang suspended in soft jelly. Marmalade may be made from many types of fruit, but all marmalade contains at least one citrus fruit. The trick to perfect marmalade, keeping the fruit suspended in the finished product, lies in the standing time allowed after the mixture has cooked and before filling the jars.

The Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County reveal even more tips to perfecting these unusual fruit spreads at the free public education class being offered on September 24th and again on September 27th at the County Ag Building in Placerville at 311 Fair Lane. Class begins each day at 10:00 a.m. and ends around noon.

Did you know that the first settlers in America preserved foods for several reasons? Of course, there was no refrigeration, so other preserving methods became necessary. However, Trudy Eden, in her article, "The Art of Preserving: How Cooks in Colonial Virginia Imitated Nature to Control It" makes a case for another reason for the popularity of preserved fruit spreads. The article explains that many early settlers believed that preserved food aided digestion, thus ensuring a healthy disposition. The thought that fruit, when preserved with sugar, actually became superior to fresh as a digestion aid resulted in many tables being set with conserves and jams, much like the salt and pepper found on modern tables.

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/.