Dark and stormy

The Black Boy peach is a wild and fragrant alternative to its sunnier golden cousins

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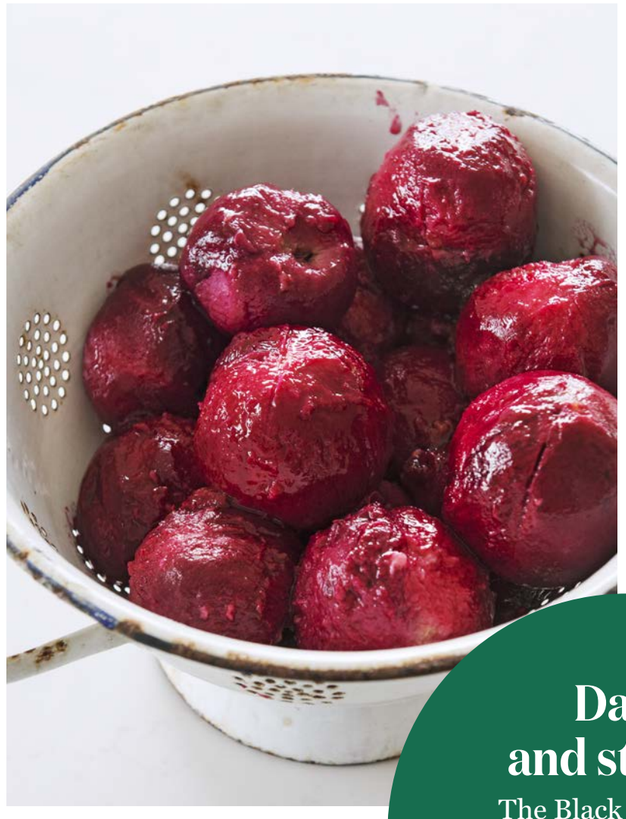

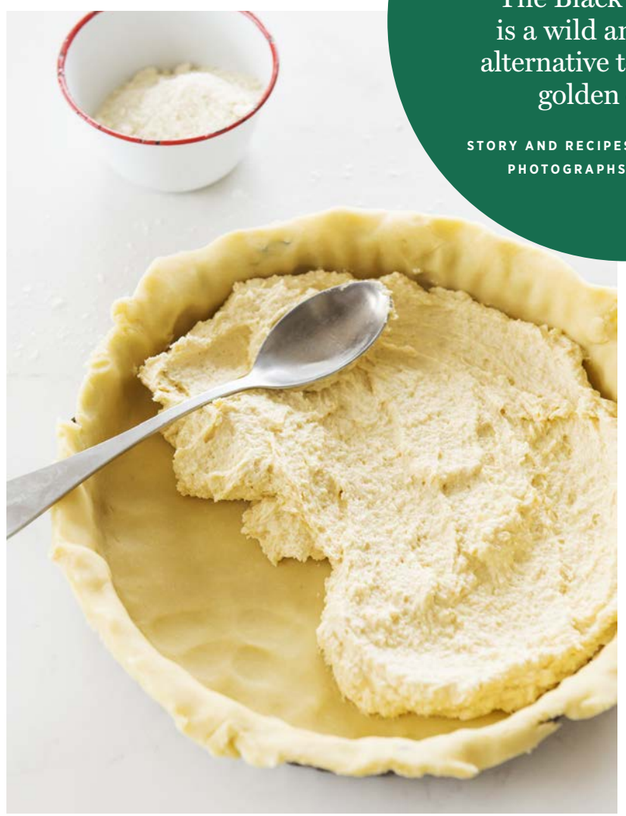

LAST SUMMER I discovered a Black Boy peach tree growing on the edge of my property; after six years in residence, it was a deliciously sweet surprise. The Black Boy peach is a heritage variety with wine-coloured skin and flesh, and the most divine, fragrant flavour. Also known as 'pêche de vigne', these peaches originate from the old Lyonnais region in east-central France where for centuries they were planted in vineyards to provide an early warning of pests and diseases. While rarely seen in shops, Black Boy peaches are often grown in New Zealand backyards and are delicious fresh, cooked or preserved.

Bottled Black Boy peaches

READY IN 35 minutes
MAKES 5-6 x 280-300ml jars GLUTEN FREE

Preserving fruit is a wonderful way to taste those summery flavours long after the season is a distant memory. I remember my mother cooking batches of golden peaches, plums, pears and passionfruit at the end of every summer and stacking the laundry cupboard full of preserves to keep our family of six happy and well-fed throughout the year.

When bottling fruit and vegetables, use any large jars as long as they are clean and sterile – I like to use Agee utility jars.

When filling your hot jars, the fruit can be cold as long as the syrup is boiling when added – the fruit will cook from the heat of the jars and syrup. Once your jar of preserves has been opened, the peaches will be just the right texture to enjoy with dessert or as a topping for yoghurt and breakfast cereal.

1¼ cups sugar
5¼ cups water
2kg peaches, blanched, peeled and halved (see Tip)

1 Sterilise jars and seals or lids as described in panel, right.
2 Combine sugar and water in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Simmer until sugar has dissolved.
3 Keep syrup hot. Drain peach halves and pack, cut-side down, into hot jars, leaving 1.5cm headspace. Add hot syrup to cover peaches, leaving 1cm gap between liquid and rim. Remove air bubbles by sliding a thin, sterilised knife down the inside of jar, then top up with syrup.
4 Wipe jar rims and threads with a sterile hot cloth. Place lids or seals and bands on jars. Leave to cool a little before tightening. As the jar cools, the shrinking of the hot contents and lid will create a vacuum. You may hear a popping sound, which means the jar has sealed.
5 Wash off any spills, label and store in a cool, dark place. These will keep for a year. Refrigerate once opened.

TIP
To peel peaches, cut a cross in the base of each and place in a large bowl. Cover with boiling water, leave for 2 minutes, then drain and refresh with cold water. Peel off skins.

How to sterilise

Wash your jars in hot, soapy water or in the top rack of a dishwasher, then heat them for at least 15 minutes in an oven at 125°C. You should also boil the seals or lids on the stovetop for 5 minutes then remove from water with sterilised tongs. (You don't need to boil the bands.)

Black Boy peach relish

READY IN 1 hour 30 minutes **MAKES** About 4 x 300ml jars

GLUTEN FREE

Black Boy peaches make a lovely, rich, burgundy-coloured fruit relish. After bottling, leave this relish in the cupboard for two to three weeks before eating to allow the flavours to develop. I often serve a little alongside a seared steak of beef, lamb or venison as an instant sauce.

- 150g butter
- 2 large onions, roughly chopped
- 1.5kg Black Boy peaches, peeled (see Tip on previous page), stoned, quartered
- 1 cup brown sugar (firmly packed)
- 1½ cups red or white wine vinegar or cider vinegar

1 Sterilise jars and seals or lids – see 'How to sterilise' on previous page.

2 Heat butter over medium heat in a non-reactive saucepan and cook onions until soft, then add peaches and cook till softened (about 20 minutes).

3 Sample a small amount of cooked peach and onion and taste for sweetness. Add ¾ cup sugar and taste again. Add more if needed.

4 Add vinegar, stir well and bring to the boil then turn down to just above simmering point. Cook, occasionally stirring to prevent the sugars from burning, for 45 minutes or until thickened.

5 Fill the hot jars and seal. Store relish in a dark cupboard; it will keep for up to a year. Once opened, it will keep in the fridge for up to three weeks.

Black Boy peach frangipane tart

READY IN 1 hour 30 minutes **SERVES** 12

PASTRY
- 250g plain flour
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp finely grated lemon zest
- 150g butter, chilled
- 60ml cold water
- 1-2 Tbsp lemon juice

FILLING
- 60g butter, at room temperature
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 Tbsp rum, brandy, bourbon or vanilla extract
- 1 cup ground almonds
- ¼ tsp baking powder

TOPPING
- 8 medium peaches, quartered, stoned
- ½ cup sliced almonds
- 3 Tbsp raw or brown sugar
- Fresh whipped cream, to serve

1 In a large bowl, combine flour and salt. Add lemon zest and cut butter into flour. Using the back of a fork, incorporate butter into flour mixture. Add cold water and 1 Tbsp lemon juice, and continue to stir with fork until mixture comes together. Add remaining juice and more water if necessary, 1 Tbsp at a time. Gently form dough into thick disc, wrap and chill until ready to use.

2 For the filling, place the butter and sugar in a medium bowl and beat with a wooden spoon until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in eggs, add the brandy or vanilla extract, and stir in the ground almonds, baking powder and a pinch of salt. Cover and set aside.

3 Preheat oven to 200°C.

4 Grease a 26cm flan tin with a removable base. On a lightly floured work surface, roll the dough out into a large circle about 3cm larger than the tin. Transfer pastry to tin and gently press into tin with fingertips. Trim off any overhanging pastry and refrigerate the tin for 10 minutes.

5 Spoon filling into centre of tart and spread all the way to the edges. Arrange peach pieces in a single layer on top until the surface of the tart is covered. Sprinkle sliced almonds and sugar on top.

6 Bake in the oven for 35-45 minutes or until crust is golden. Allow to cool for 15 minutes before slicing and serving with whipped cream.

TIPS
- The pastry and filling can be made up to a week in advance and stored airtight in fridge (wrap pastry in plastic wrap).
- To make the pastry in a food processor, pulse the flour, salt and lemon zest to combine. Add butter, then pulse at 1-second intervals until butter is finely cut. Add the water and lemon juice and pulse until the mixture starts to bind. Tip onto a floured surface and gently pat together.

Black Boy peach jam

READY IN 1 hour **MAKES** 5 x 300ml jars

GLUTEN FREE

- 2kg Black Boy peaches, peeled (see Tip on page 97), halved, stones reserved
- Zest 1 large lemon
- 1kg sugar
- Juice 3 lemons
- 3 Tbsp kirsch, orange liqueur or vanilla extract

1 Sterilise jars and seals or lids – see 'How to sterilise' on page 97.

2 Place peach halves and lemon zest in a large saucepan. Wrap peach stones in a clean piece of calico or Chux cloth and tie with string. Add parcel to saucepan. Cover and simmer on a very low heat for 20 minutes or until fruit is tender.

3 Remove the stones, add sugar and lemon juice, and bring back to simmering point. Stir occasionally to stop the sugar catching and cook for about 20 minutes or until the jam starts to thicken. Test for a set (see page 83 for instructions).

4 Once the jam is at setting point, remove from heat and stir in liqueur or vanilla extract.

5 Immediately fill hot jars and seal with a sterilised lid. Leave to cool. Store jam in the fridge once opened.

TIP

The lemon in this recipe will help to set the jam and define its flavour. Adding peach stones to the pan also helps to set the jam quickly. Very ripe peaches contain less pectin, so a good trick is to add a few not-so-ripe ones to the mix. ●