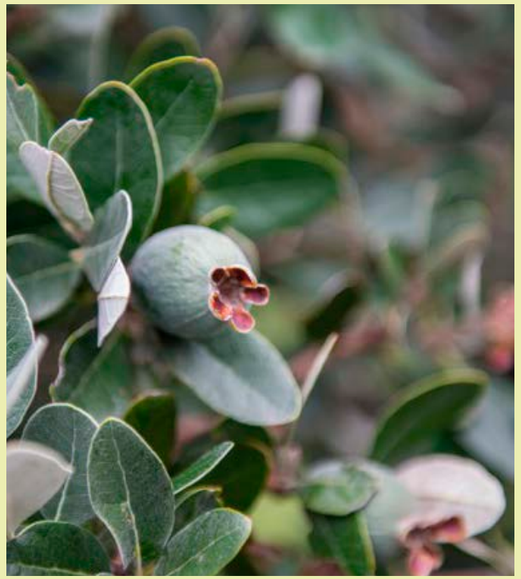


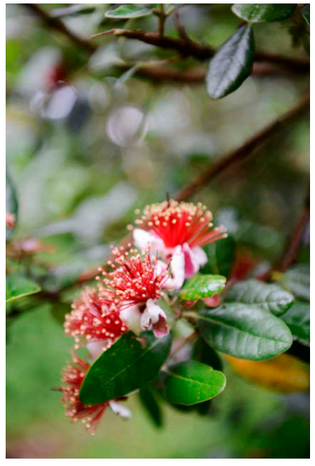
The scent of home

The feijoa is a Kiwi favourite, but outside New Zealand and South America they're almost unheard of. Tracey Sunderland celebrates this amazingly fragrant little green fruit

STORY Tracey Sunderland **PHOTOGRAPHS** Vanessa Lewis

Autumn is one of my favourite seasons for a simple reason; it's feijoa time. Although related to pohutukawa, rata and manuka and beloved by Kiwis everywhere, the feijoa is not indigenous to these parts – it was introduced to New Zealand from Brazil and Uruguay in the 1920s. But its nearly 100-year heritage is peanuts to the feijoa-growing Wastney family, who are fifth-generation farmers at Rivington Farm in Nelson. In fact, Ian's great grandfather came out on the same ship as Arthur Wakefield (one of the founders of the Nelson settlement) in 1841 and the family farm lies 10 minutes north of Nelson city in Wakapuaka, one of the first areas allocated to settlers in the then Nelson province.

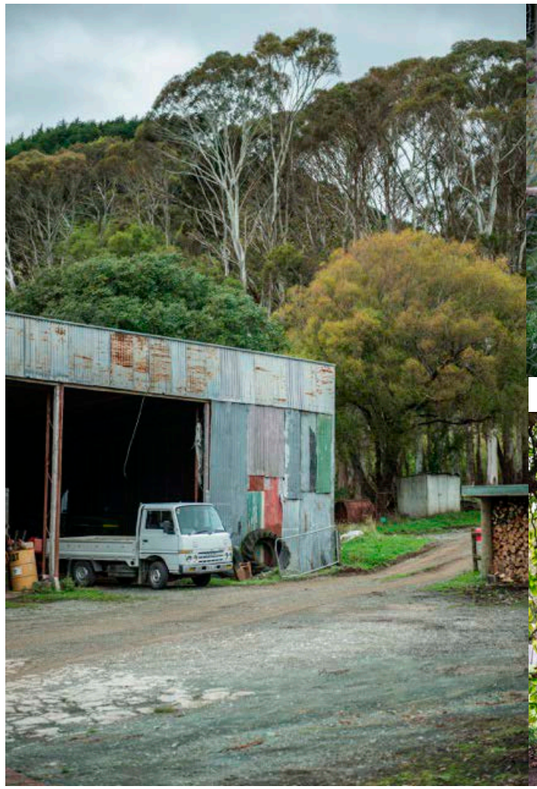
We followed the road to Rivington, weaving around the coast, and it didn't take us long to see the terraces of feijoa trees nestled into the hill, with manuka and wild bush behind. Ian was there to greet us, accompanied by dogs Billy, Bonnie and Meg plus Dora the kitten.

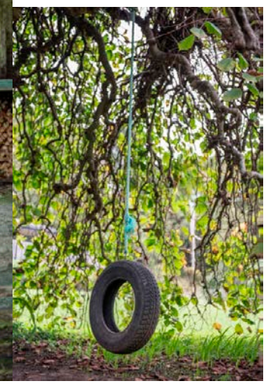


Although Ian and his wife Sally have a long farming background, their foray into feijoa cultivation is relatively recent. It was seeing the terraced olive groves of Italy that inspired them to develop the wild bush adjoining their home. Luckily, Ian is an experienced digger operator, so with a lot of hard work and perseverance, they cleared the land, then planted and irrigated it. They are now into their seventh feijoa harvest and have hit upon a favoured way to treat their bounty.

When ripe, the feijoas are left to drop into a net to avoid bruising. The fruit are then peeled and sliced, air dried and packed. The result is a delicious snack that's high in vitamin C, low in calories, cholesterol-free and a good source of fibre. Their business, Little Beauties (inspired by the Kiwi colloquialism "you little beauty"), which produces the snackable dried feijoa, was conceived and set up in collaboration with their five kids as a way of keeping the land viable for the next generation of 15 grandchildren (and counting). The product range includes a white chocolate-dipped version, as well as dried golden kiwifruit.

Ian and Sally's daughter, Sarah (who was expecting the Wastneys' 16th grandchild at the time we visited), loves to bake and shares her recipes on her blog whatsarahbakes.com. Her delicious feijoa and coconut granola is featured opposite.





Feijoa & coconut granola

READY IN 40 minutes plus cooling time
MAKES 7 cups RECIPE BY Sarah Sears
WHATSARAHBAKES.COM

- 3 cups wholegrain oats
- 1 cup rolled oats
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ cup sunflower seeds
- ½ cup hazelnuts (and/or almonds), chopped
- ⅓ cup canola oil
- ⅓ cup maple syrup
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- 50g Little Beauties dried feijoas, roughly chopped

1 Preheat oven to 170°C and line a large baking tray with baking paper.
2 In a large bowl combine oats, ground ginger, cinnamon, salt, sunflower seeds and nuts and stir until well mixed.
3 In a small bowl combine oil, maple syrup and vanilla. Add to dry ingredients and mix well until evenly combined.
4 Spread granola onto prepared baking tray and bake for 25 minutes or until golden, stirring halfway through cooking. Add shredded coconut and continue baking for 5 minutes or until golden.
5 Cool completely on baking tray, then stir through dried feijoas. Serve granola with milk, Greek yoghurt and fresh feijoas, or package in jars or bags to give away as gifts.

TIPS

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Feijoa flesh is ripe when the jellied section in the centre of the fruit is clear. The flesh is easy to preserve, either scooped out of the skin, peeled or frozen whole.

*

The flesh turns brown once cut or exposed to air. To prevent this, add lemon or lime juice when using in desserts and baking.

*

Feijoas are available from March until June.

Feijoa crème brûlée

READY IN 1 hour plus cooling and chilling time SERVES 4

GLUTEN FREE

- 4 egg yolks
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- 1 Tbsp cornflour
- 1 cup cream
- 1 tsp vanilla paste
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup lime juice
- 2 large or 4 small feijoas, peeled, large ones halved
- 3 tsp brown sugar mixed with 3 tsp white sugar

1 Preheat oven to 160°C. In a medium bowl, whisk yolks and sugar until pale yellow, then whisk in the cornflour.
2 Pour cream into a small saucepan, add vanilla, bring to boiling point then quickly remove from heat.
3 Slowly pour hot cream into yolk mixture while whisking to prevent curdling.
4 Place sieve on top of still-warm saucepan and strain mixture back into saucepan.
5 Part-fill a large pan with boiling water and place on medium-high heat. Place custard pot inside pan to form a bain-marie (see Notes); the pot should float, with water about one-quarter of the way up its sides. Stir custard until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.
6 Place sugar, water and lime juice in a small pot and stir to dissolve. Bring to the boil, add feijoas, then reduce heat, cover and poach at a gentle simmer for 2 minutes. Remove feijoas with slotted spoon and place one in each of four ramekins. Pour custard over top.
7 Place ramekins in bain-marie in oven (see Notes) Bake for 25-30 minutes until custard is firm but wobbly in middle. Cool in bain-marie, then remove, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 2-3 hours or overnight.
8 To glaze, heat oven grill to 225°C. Remove plastic wrap and gently blot any moisture from custard tops with paper towel. Sprinkle sugar mix over each and place ramekins under grill for 2-3 minutes to caramelise sugary tops (or use a cook's blowtorch). Serve immediately.

Feijoa jelly

READY IN 40 minutes MAKES 2 x 300ml jars

GLUTEN FREE

- 2 cups fresh feijoa flesh
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup water

1 Put feijoa flesh, lemon juice, sugar and water into a medium saucepan. Cover with lid and bring to boil. Turn to a low simmer and cook for 10 minutes.
2 Remove lid, stir, then turn up the heat to a rolling boil and cook for 10 minutes. Stir then simmer for a further 10 minutes.
3 To test for a set, place 1 tsp jelly on a plate and pop into the fridge for 2 minutes. If firm, the jelly is ready. If not, simmer for 5 more minutes then test again.
4 When ready, pour jelly into two hot, sterile jars or glass jelly moulds (see Notes). While still hot, cover with a cellophane preserving disc and secure with a rubber band (see Notes). Allow to cool completely then store in pantry. Keep in the fridge once opened.

NOTES

• 'Bain-marie' is the French term for a water bath, which enables ingredients such as eggs or chocolate to be cooked very gently. To make a bain-marie for the oven: line a high-sided oven dish with a tea towel. Stand your filled ramekins inside dish then place dish in oven. Carefully pour boiling water into dish to cover bottom third of ramekins, then bake; you may need to replenish boiling water during long cooking. • To sterilise, heat clean jars in oven at 160°C for 15 minutes. • Cellophane preserving discs are available at supermarkets or homeware stores, or use waxed paper circles. The trick to getting a smooth seal is to dip cellophane into a saucer of water and smooth it over top of jar before securing tightly with a rubber band. Kept dry and cool, fruit preserves will keep well for a year or more.

Feijoa, lime & poppyseed muffins

READY IN 35 minutes MAKES 15 small muffins

- 125g butter, softened, plus extra for greasing
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 6 medium feijoas, (a generous cup), plus extra, peeled and sliced, for topping
- Zest and juice 1 lime
- ¼ cup milk
- 1¾ cups self-raising flour
- ½ tsp ground ginger
- 2 Tbsp poppy seeds
- 2 Tbsp sugar, for sprinkling

1 Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease a 15-hole muffin tin with butter and dust with flour, then shake off excess.
2 Beat butter and sugar together in a large bowl with electric beaters until light and fluffy.
3 Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition.
4 Mash feijoa flesh with lime zest and juice, then stir into butter mixture along with the milk. Mix in flour, ginger and poppy seeds until just combined.
5 Spoon a heaped dessertspoonful of mixture into each of your prepared muffin holes. Press a slice of feijoa into the top of each muffin. Sprinkle sliced feijoa with sugar and bake for 15 -18 minutes until golden. ●