

Black Currant Jam

MAKES 2 PINTS

LOUISE PAWSON of the Old Cottage Tea Shop makes this jam to serve with her scones (see recipe, page 84) and clotted cream. Black currants are tart and acidic when eaten raw but pleasantly tangy when cooked.

1 lb. fresh black currants, stemmed and rinsed

4 cups granulated sugar

1. Put currants and 1½ cups water into a heavy medium pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to maintain a gentle simmer and let berries cook, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon, until berries are very soft, 15–20 minutes. Add sugar to berries and stir until dissolved. Increase heat to medium-high and bring jam to a vigorous boil, stirring often. Continue to boil, stirring frequently, until jam thickens and reaches its setting point (about 220° on a candy thermometer), 6–10 minutes. Remove pot from heat and skim any foam that has risen to the surface of the jam.

2. Meanwhile, submerge 2 pint canning jars, their lids and ring bands, and a widemouthed funnel into a large pot of boiling water over medium-high heat and sterilize for 10 minutes. Remove from hot water and transfer to a clean dish towel. Using the funnel, fill each jar with hot jam to no more than ¼" from the top. Wipe jar rims with a clean dish towel, place lids on jars, then screw on ring bands.

3. Transfer filled jars to a canning rack, submerge into pot of gently boiling water (jars should be covered by at least 1" of water), and process for 10 minutes. Carefully lift jars from water with jar tongs and place on a dish towel at least 1" apart to let cool undisturbed for 24 hours. To test that jars have properly sealed, press on center of each lid. Remove your finger; if lid stays down, it's sealed. Refrigerate any jam that hasn't sealed and use within 4 weeks.

bit into the scone, and with a muffled "Hurrah!" I finally knew what all the fuss was about. The scone was golden and nubbly on the outside, light and moist on the inside. The cream was as cold and soft as silk and luxuriously buttery in texture and had the comforting cooked flavor of steamed milk. Through it all shone the sharp, joyous tang of black currants.

I couldn't help feeling wicked as I licked my fingers and loaded up another scone, but then I noticed that I wasn't the only one. The tearoom was hushed. Everybody seemed to be experiencing his or her pleasure rather privately, heads down and mouths busy chewing. On the way out I thanked the owner, Louise Pawson, a soft-spoken woman with a peaches-and-cream complexion, who has been running the Old Cottage for 18 years. She told me that the house dated to 1780 and had served as a tearoom since the 1950s. "It's a lot of work, and I often end up spending Sundays picking fruit for my jams," she said, "but I think it's important to do it right. The locals treat it as a second home."

THE NEXT DAY, I paid a visit to Ian and Samantha Vincent, the young owners of Higher Murchington Farm, a dairy whose exceptional clotted cream I had encountered at the Old Cottage