

Making Wild Grape Jelly

By Gloria Hildebrandt

Taste can bring forth memories. I know this is true of smell, but I didn't know it about taste. I was making my first batch of wild grape jelly today, and when I sampled it for sweetness, it tasted exactly like my mother's wild grape jelly. In one way it's not surprising, because I picked the grapes from land she used to own, even possibly from grapevines she used to harvest from. I didn't have her recipe, though. I followed the pectin manufacturer's instructions.

Lots of people loved my mother's grape jelly. When I was in residence at university, my mother gave me jars of jelly for snacking on toast in my room. When friends heard that I was going home for the weekend, they used to ask "Are you going to bring back more grape jelly?"

I remembered the jelly tasting great, but I had never made it before. So when it tasted just like hers, with a rich grape flavour and a sweet-tart tang to it, I was amazed and thrilled. In fact tears came to my eyes. I was thrown back to her food and a strong memory of her in her prime, healthy and competent. If I can make jelly just like she did, from the land, it will be like keeping her legacy alive.

It's easier to keep my father's legacy alive because he did so much with the land. He created the gardens, he made the paths through the property, he had the pond dug, he planted the trees that tower overhead. My mother left things up to him. But she picked vegetables and fruit from his garden, and then she went foraging over the acreage.

To have her memory come stealing into my kitchen at

my first nervous attempt at making jelly was an unexpected and wonderful thing. It was almost as if her ghost or spirit was there with me, giving me confidence, encouraging me. Saying that if she did it, I could too.

Foraging for Fruit

If I can make jams or jellies from the abundance of fruit growing wild on my property, I will feel a little independent of possible future hard times. I'll be able to keep some of our own food through the winter. I can be proud of my chemical-free products. For our annual Christmas Eve party, I'll be able to make not only a baked crumble from my own harvested and frozen rhubarb, I can make jam-filled thumbprint shortbread cookies with my own jelly. The

thought of that is satisfying.

I'll have to explore the property for more fruits. There are plenty of wild apple trees. I've seen some gooseberry bushes. I'd like more wild grapes. The wild blackberries and raspberries are too delicious raw to be made into jams or pies. Can Highbush Cranberries be used for jelly?

I have plenty of them growing.

Making my first jelly will have me looking at my property's trees and tasting their fruits in a whole new way.

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► My friend Sherrie showed me how to can jelly.

▼ First harvest: precious jars of grape jelly cooling down. The white residue is lime from my hard Escarpment well water and was easily wiped off with a damp cloth.

