

Sott'Oli & Sotto Aceti Preparations, Canning in own juice, Jams & Preserves

Capturing Summer for the Winter Months
addendum pages to August 20 Cooking Course

In the days before refrigeration, the summer months were perhaps the busiest time of the year for Italian cooks, especially those with access to a garden: Throughout the land people broke out the canning jars and set to work, selecting, peeling, and slicing the various vegetables and fruit as they reached optimum ripeness, cooking them if need be, packing the jars, filling them with oil, vinegar, or syrup, and sterilizing them before they packed them off in the pantry to await the winter months, when the selection of fresh fruit and vegetables was greatly reduced.

Now, of course, refrigeration, commercial cold storage, and long distance shipping have greatly increased the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables, many of which are no longer seasonal but rather sold year round. There is therefore less need for preserving summer's bounty, on the one hand, and on the other, just about everything one could ask for is pickled or packed in oil commercially. This doesn't mean that Italians have stopped making *sott'oli* and *sott'aceti*, however.

Those who have vegetable gardens must still preserve what they do not consume or give away, and many people find the less expensive commercially produced pickles, which are made to appeal to as broad a consumer base as possible and therefore omit some herbs and spices, insipid enough that they would rather make their own. There's a quiet satisfaction to the process, one can tailor the recipes to suit one's tastes, and they also make excellent gifts.

Italians like to can vegetables and fruits in their own juice, this is especially true of tomatoes; but you will find that, at every table in Italy, there is a huge selection of vegetables preserved in either oil or vinegar.

So, a couple of words on ***Sott'oli*** and ***Sott'aceti*** before we begin: though Italians often mention them in the same breath, and both figure prominently in the classic platter of antipasti that begin many an Italian meal, they are quite distinct.

- ***Sott'aceti*** are vegetables that have been pickled in vinegar, whose acidity keeps the food from spoiling. Italians generally use wine vinegar, though apple vinegar will also work, as will flavored vinegars, which will give your sotto aceti an extra touch. When selecting vinegar for pickling, make certain it's fairly strong, especially if you plan to pickle vegetables that have high moisture contents.

- ***Sott'oli*** are vegetables packed in olive oil, and require much more care in preparation than do *sott'aceti*, because oil is not a preservative; it prevents spoilage merely by isolating the vegetables from the air. This means that the vegetables must be fully cooked (often in vinegar, whose acidity acts as a disinfectant) and transferred immediately to a sterile jar, which must be filled immediately, and tapped briskly so as to dislodge all the air bubbles.

Do not pack anything raw in oil, because raw vegetables can harbor bacteria on their surfaces even if they have been well washed, and some of these bacteria can do quite well in the anaerobic (i.e. airless) environment of a *sott'olio* jar. In particular, garlic has been known to harbor the bacteria that cause botulism. Therefore, when you open a jar of *sott'oli*, be careful. If the lid is domed up, and there's a whisper of air escaping the jar, discard it, because it might not be safe.

What will you need? –

First of all, **the vegetables** that you have decided to decided to pickle or pack in oil, which should be ripe and blemish free. Wash them well to remove all traces of dirt, working quickly if the vegetables are the sort that will absorb moisture (mushrooms, for example). Pat them dry when you're done washing them.

Broad mouthed canning jars; if they are of the sort that has a glass lid held down by a metal clip, make certain the gaskets are in good order. If you are instead using canning jars with screw cap lids, check the lids and purchase new ones if need be. While one can find canning jars of many sizes, the best for home canning are 1 and 2 cup (250 to 500 ml), because once a jar has been opened its contents won't keep for long. You will probably also want the little plastic grates that go under the lids of the jar and press down on the contents to keep them submerged. Though these grates are handy they're not absolutely necessary; what's important is that you not overpack the jars with the vegetables and in all cases fill them to the brim with oil or vinegar.

A sterilizer (if the recipe calls for it), which is simply a large pot with a rack that will allow you to boil the jars of what you are making without their coming into contact with either the walls or the floor of the pot.

A pot for cooking the vegetables. It should conduct heat well, be large enough to hold your vegetables comfortably, and should be made of a material that doesn't react with vinegar or other acids. Stainless steel is probably best.

The basic preparations for the two different ways of preserving are as follows:

SOTT'ACETO - Marinating in Vinegar - This preparation is suitable for new onions, carrots, turnips, small cucumbers, peppers, string beans and celery. The vinegar has to be very good but not too strong, and preferably white so as not to change the color of the vegetables or make them too sour. This is the typical recipe for the preparation:

- 1 Kg mixed vegetables (pearl or button onion, peppers, celery, tiny cucumbers (gherkins, carrots, etc.)
- 1 ½ liter wine vinegar
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 pinch of sugar (optional)
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 clove
- 5 peppercorns
- salt
- 1 pinch of mixed spices (thyme, sage, rosemary, etc.)
- 1 tsp. olive oil

Clean, wash and cut the vegetables according to the various types. Boil half the amount of vinegar, let cool and set aside. In a large saucepan bring to a boil the remaining vinegar with 1/2 bay leaf, a pinch of sugar, the clove garlic, the clove, 5 peppercorns, and a pinch of salt. Add the vegetables and let cook for at least 3 mins, according to the type of greens.

Remove the pot from the heat and, when the vinegar has cooled, drain the vegetables and place them in a jar. Add the remaining bay leaf and the peppercorn, spices, oil and vinegar that had been set aside. Cover the jar with an air-tight cover. Store for later use.

SOTT'OLIO - Preserving in Oil - This preparation is suitable for small artichokes, mushrooms and eggplants.

Prepare the vegetables in the same way as for sott'aceto. Cook them in 3 parts vinegar to 1 part water with a pinch of salt until they are barely tender and still crisp. Drain and let dry on a clean towel. Then place in a jar with few peppercorns, a few bay leaves, and other spices you like. Cover completely with extra-virgin olive oil, close the jar with an air-tight cover and store. You will need to check the jars every other day for the first week as the vegetables will absorb the oil and you will need to add some to the jar to make sure everything is well covered with it.

PRESERVING IN OWN JUICE

This is the most typical way of preserving tomatoes when you want just its full taste to dominate the preparation.

Dadolata di pomodoro

- 4 kg fully ripe unblemished San Marzano tomatoes
- basil leaves
- 1 small handful of salt
- Extra virgin olive oil

This is the classic sauce when you desire the full taste of the tomatoes, without any other added vegetables. The classic recipe requires you to peel the tomatoes and discard all the liquid and seeds, but I personally think that the procedure is foolish as it completely throws away the skin (that holds the largest amount of lycopene, a strong antioxidant carotenoid, which is good for us) while the juice and seeds hold the highest amount of glutamic acid, a proteinogenic amino acid, responsible for the umami taste of the tomato. Basically you would be depriving the fruit of the best it can offer.

The procedure to keep all this goodness is just a little bit more involved but quite easy to follow. We will proceed as per the classic recipe, but keep all they chunk away. Wash the tomatoes and with a serrated knife (do not use a regular knife as the acidity of the tomato juice will oxidize the blade very fast and dull it!) cut a cross at the bottom of each tomato (this will help with the peeling).

Put a pot of water to boil and immerge the tomatoes, a few at a time, letting them boil for about 50 seconds, then skim them out and plunge them in a container with iced water. This thermal chock will make it easy to peel. Peel the tomatoes keeping the skins in a separate container, than cut the tomato in four pieces and put the juice and seeds in this same container. You will obtain 4 tomato filets that you will cut into small cubes (brunoise). **

Meanwhile you will use a food processor to mill all the seeds, skinks and water residue into a sauce. Place these cubes into the jars, which you will carefully and completely with the sauce just made. Close the jars and sterilize for 20 minutes. Let the jars cool in the water completely before removing and placing in a cool, dry and dark place for storing.

** At this point you would also be able to use the freshly made cubes to prepare a **Bruschetta**.

Just take the cubed tomatoes, add a pinch of salt, a little hot pepper, crushed garlic to taste and freshly cut basil leaves (if you want to chop the leaves rather than break them apart by hand, please use a non-iron knife so that the leaves do not turn dark and the taste remains completely fresh). Mix well and let the topping rest for a while to give it the opportunity to blend the flavors completely.

Use it to top some toasted bread (hard crust)

SOTT'ACETO RECIPES

Pickled Bell Pepper Recipe - Peperoni Sotto Aceto - Bell peppers are astonishingly versatile, and these pickled bell peppers will be quite nice either as part of a mixed antipasto, or with boiled meats during the winter months. To make about 1 kg of finished product you'll need:

- 1.5 kg firm, fleshy peppers of the color you most prefer
- 2 liters white wine vinegar
- An onion, sliced
- Several bay leaves
- A teaspoon of peppercorns
- A palmful of salt (without additives)
- Olive oil

Holding the peppers by their stems or with tongs, hold them over a gas flame, turning them this way and that, until their skins blister. Remove the skins under cool running water, and cut the peppers into rings, discarding the stems and seeds. Another method for skinning the peppers is to cut them into strips, ribbing and seeding them, and run them under a broiler, skin side up, until the skins are blistered. In any case, once you have skinned the peppers bring the vinegar to a boil with the herbs, spices, onion, and salt, and cook the peppers for a few minutes. Remove them with a slotted spoon, draining them well, and transfer them to clean sterile canning jars. Filter the vinegar, returning it to the pot, and bring it to a boil again; while it's heating divvy the onion rings and bay leaves among the jars. Pour the boiling vinegar over the peppers, add a tablespoon of oil to each jar, and seal them up. Put them in a cool dark place for a month, and they're ready. Expect them to keep for a year.

Small Onions in Vinegar - Cipolline Sott' Aceto

- 2 cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 whole bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 2-inch piece cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon coarse salt
- 1 pound boiling onions, peeled and left whole

In a non-aluminum saucepan, boil the vinegar with all the ingredients except the onions for 3 or 4 minutes. Make a small incision in each onion with a knife and add them to the vinegar mixture and cook 2 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow the onions to steep, covered, in the vinegar for several hours. Transfer the onions and the vinegar mixture to a jar, cap and store in the refrigerator. Keeps for a month.

Garlic in Vinegar - Aglio Sott'Aceto - By immersing fresh garlic cloves in good vinegar, they become milder in flavor and are good to use when you want a whiff of garlic in a dish, not a pungent reminder. The success of this preparation depends on garlic that is not too old. Look for tight knobs with no splits, soft spots, or sprouts growing from the knob.

- 2 or 3 bulbs of fresh garlic, separated into cloves, peeled, and left whole
- 1 gallon white cider or white wine vinegar
- Fresh whole basil leaves, stemmed and wiped dry
- Whole peppercorns
- Whole coriander seeds
- Coarse Kosher salt
- 4 one quart bottles

Use dark bottles to prevent light from turning the garlic dark. Make as many as you like, putting at least six garlic cloves in each bottle with 2 to 4 fresh basil leaves, 8 to 10 peppercorns, 1 teaspoon of coriander seeds, and 1 teaspoon of salt. Fill to the top with vinegar and cap. Shake the bottles occasionally; store in a cool, dark spot. The vinegar is ready to use in 4 weeks. Use smaller decorative bottles to make customized "presents" to share with family and friends. Use the vinegar to sprinkle on boiled meats, in potato salads and green salads, vegetable dishes, and for deglazing pans.

Pomodori verdi sott'aceto

- 1 kg green tomatoes
- A few leaves of mint – fresh or dried
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 dried red chillies
- a tablespoon and a half of mustard seed
- a tablespoon of black peppercorns
- 4-5 cloves
- 1 liter of cider vinegar
- 125ml water
- 4 tablespoons of honey
- 1 tablespoon of salt

Make lots of holes in the tomatoes with a toothpick or cocktail stick and put them in a sterilized jar with the herbs and spices. Put the water, vinegar, honey and salt in a saucepan and boil for 5 minutes. Pour the mixture into the jars over the tomatoes. If the tomatoes are not covered, top up with some cold vinegar. Press them down firmly and seal the jars. You can eat them after a month, but 2 or 3 months is even better. Make sure you use them within one year. You can use the same method to pickle cucumbers and onions

Carote in agrodolce - There are generally seven types of cold Italian antipasti: Sott'aceto, sott'olio, salted, meat based, fish based, cheese based and bread based. This recipe from Piedmont belongs to the first category, and it is very good this time of year, when you have a craving for salads and fresh vegetables. Yet the tasty, sweet and sour carrots are preserved and may keep for weeks in a clean, airtight container. They are really easy to prepare and easier still to serve along with other antipasti sott'aceto such as olives, onions, cucumbers and artichokes. Especially, if you are entertaining many guests and wish to show off with a full plate of delicious starters.

- ½ kg peeled carrots
- 1 dl vinegar made on white wine
- 1 dl dry white wine
- 1 dl water
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- Fresh mint, rosemary, parsley
- Salt and pepper

Slice the carrots or cut them up into long julienne sticks. Place the carrots and the peeled cloves of garlic in a casserole with water, wine and vinegar. Add sugar, oil and herbs, and let it boil for 8-10 minutes until the carrots are al dente. Remove the herbs and transfer the carrots to a clean glass. Cover with the boiling liquid, and leave the carrots in the fridge for a day or two. (They are delicious from day one, but a rest may improve the taste further.) Sprinkle with fresh basil leaves before serving.

SOTT'OLIO RECIPES

Italian Canned Vegetables - Sott'oli are canned vegetables packed in oil, and are also one of the more common commercially prepared antipasti. If you have a vegetable garden, making them isn't that hard, though you may have to experiment with your herb mix to get the effect you want. How to proceed?

Take firm vegetables from your garden, for example bell peppers, tiny button onions, baby mushrooms, carrots, baby artichoke hearts, tiny cucumbers, and so on, wash them well, cut them into small bite-sized pieces (quarter the artichoke hearts, if you're using them, and dispose of any fuzz they may contain) and blanch them for a few minutes in a water-and-vinegar solution. Drain them well, pat them dry, and pack them in olive oil in a jar with the herbs of choice, which can include pepper corns, coriander, bay leaves, parsley, oregano, cloves, or what have you.

Once you've filled the jar with oil give it a few sharp taps, turning it this way and that, to dislodge air bubbles, seal it tight, and store it in a cool dark place for a few weeks to give the herbs the time they need to flavor the vegetables.

Carciofi Sott'Olio - Artichokes canned in oil are among the most classic of antipasti, and are also quite nice as garnishes, for example with boiled meats. To make 2 1/4 pounds (1 k) of artichokes you'll need:

- About 2 dozen medium sized, very firm artichokes
- 4 to 5 lemons
- A handful of peppercorns
- Several bay leaves
- 1 quart of white wine vinegar, and another quart of dry white wine (2 liters of liquid in all)
- Olive oil

Squeeze the lemons, collecting the juice in a bowl. Clean the artichokes, removing the tough outer leaves and trimming the tips. Cut them into wedges (if they're firm there shouldn't be any fuzz in the chokes; should you find some remove it), and put the wedges in the lemon juice to keep them from discoloring.

Bring the wine and vinegar to a boil with the bay leaves and peppercorns and add the artichoke wedges; cook them until they are done but don't overcook them lest they become soft and mushy. Set the artichoke slices to drain on a clean dry cloth (you may need more than one), pressing them gently with a second cloth to extract the moisture. Transfer the artichokes to sterile glass jars and add olive oil to cover. Put the jars uncovered in a cool dark place for a couple of days, keeping an eye on them and adding more oil if necessary, then cover them and let them sit for at least 40 days before using them.

Zucchine Sott'Olio

- 2 pounds zucchini
- Salt water, for covering
- White wine vinegar, plus 1/2 cup for covering
- 4 cloves garlic, sliced
- 3 anchovy fillets
- 3 fresh mint leaves
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for covering

Cut the zucchini lengthwise 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick slices. Place the slices in a medium-sized saucepan. Cover with 2 parts salted water and 1 part vinegar. Bring the mixture to a boil over high heat and allow to boil for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat. Drain the zucchini and place them into a jar or a bowl. Season with the garlic, anchovies, mint, oregano, and red pepper flakes. Add 2 cups of oil and

½ cup vinegar. Completely submerge the zucchini in olive oil. Tightly seal the jar or bowl. Zucchini are ready to eat, but also may be kept like this, refrigerated, for up to 6 weeks, as long as the olive oil level is kept so that the zucchini are submerged.

Eggplants STANDARD RECIPE - The best melanzane are large, firm without a lot of seed, and a nice deep purple with a shiny taught skin. When they are not fresh, they become wrinkly and soft.

- 6 Eggplants
- ½ kg of table salt
- 500 mls of white wine vinegar
- 4 tablespoons of home dried Oregano,
- 2 teaspoon of ground dried Chilli
- 5-6 cloves of Garlic
- Olive oil to cover
- Some bricks (about 4 or 5)
- 8-9 cleaned jam jars 6 of 360 grams

Firstly peel the eggplants. And then slice them lengthwise into 3-4 mm slices. Further slice these into 5mm strips. (Alternatively you can just slice the eggplant lengthwise into 1-2 mm slices. If they are sliced this way you may not want to peel them.) Place the slices/strips in layers, in a plastic tub with vertical sides. Cover each layer liberally with the cooking salt. Once the melanzane strips are well covered and mixed with the salt, place a plate over them and place a weight of about 10 kg (or four bricks) on the plate. Leave the melanzane under the weight for 24 hours. They will produce a salty dark liquid. Drain and discard the liquid. Remove the bricks and loosen the slightly dry melanzane strips with your hands. Pour on the good quality white wine vinegar and mix thoroughly. Allow to stand for 1 hour. The melanzane will seem to absorb the vinegar. Replace the plate and weight for a further 12 hours. Again drain the excess vinegar. Lastly, squeeze the strips by hand and place into a bowl. Mix the pickled and dry melanzane with chopped fresh garlic, home dried oregano and hot chilli to taste, either whole or finely chopped (this can be dried or fresh). The last step is bottling the pickled melanzane. Pour 2-3 tablespoon of olive oil into the prepared glass jars. Press the vegetables, garlic and herbs into glass jars adding a small amount of olive oil as you press down, to ensure that the oil is evenly distributed throughout the jar. Finally, press firmly and cover with olive oil, ensuring that you have no melanzane above the oil level. Check after 2-3 days to ensure that you do not have to top up with oil, as the vegetables will absorb some of the oil and you may need to top up the jars. Seal and store. These are best eaten after 3 months as they are still sharp and crunchy. They will last for up to 12 months but will not be at their peak.

There are almost limitless variations to the above recipe, depending on what is available in your garden at the time. Any extra vegetable is sliced and mixed with the melanzane at the beginning and therefore are salted and pickled in the same way as the melanzane.

Pickled Eggplant

- 6 Eggplants
- Kosher Salt
- White or Cider Vinegar
- 3 - 4 cloves garlic, sliced thin
- One bunch parsley, minced
- Some mint, minced (optional, but nice)
- ½ - 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ¼ green bell pepper, minced

Slice the eggplant thinly, and cut the slices into thin strips. Layer the strips in a colander and mix with some Kosher Salt. Place the colander in the sink, put a dish on top of it, and put something heavy on top of the dish to weigh it down. This helps take the bitterness out of the eggplant. After one hour, squeeze the eggplant. Take a large pot and put in the eggplant. Cover with a ratio of 2 cups of water to 1 cup of the vinegar and bring to a boil. As soon as it boils, shut the heat off and allow the eggplant to cool in the water. In a large bowl place the sliced garlic, chopped herbs, red

pepper, and green pepper. Squeeze as much water out of the eggplant as you can, and place it in the bowl. Pour in some extra virgin olive oil (at least a cup) and a ¼ cup of vinegar. Stir well. Place the eggplant in a jar, pressing down to remove any air. Leave about an inch at the top, and pour in some olive oil so that all the eggplant is submerged. Cover with a lid, and let marinate for one month in the refrigerator.

Melanzane Sott'Olio 1

- 3 pounds eggplant
- 1 cup salt
- 1 bunch mint leaves
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 or 2 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar, plus 2 tablespoons
- 4 hot peppers
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large jar with lid

Remove stems and cut eggplants ½ inch thick lengthwise. Toss in bowl with salt to coat and place on a roasting rack over roasting pan. Cover with one layer of cheesecloth and place 4 bricks, covered in foil, over it. Put in cool place for 12 hours. Remove from rack and place in large bowl. Add mint, garlic, bay leaf, 2 tablespoons vinegar and toss to coat thoroughly. Lay eggplant slices in jar, 1 on top of other until nearly full. Place hot peppers intermittently between the layers. Press eggplant down into jar with fingers and add remaining vinegar. Fill jar with olive oil and cover. Place in refrigerator. The eggplant are ready to eat but will improve after aging one week. Top off with oil if the level goes below the top of the eggplant. Eat at room temperature as antipasto.

Melanzane Sott'Olio 2

- 2 medium eggplants
- Fine salt
- 2 cups white vinegar
- 5 cloves garlic
- Several sprigs of fresh thyme
- 1 tbsp crushed red chili flake
- High quality olive oil
- 2 1-pint canning jars

Peel the eggplant. Trim the edges, and slice into very thin strips (or if you prefer into rounds). Layer the strips into a colander, and sprinkle vigorously with salt. Place a weight on top of the strips to weigh them down, and place the colander on a plate (to catch excess water). Let sit overnight. This will allow some of the water from the eggplant to be removed. Brush off excess salt from eggplant. In a large sauté pan, combine 2 cups water with the vinegar and bring to a boil. In batches, cook eggplant and garlic for about two minutes. Remove from the mixture and set on a towel lined sheet tray for 30 minutes. Squeeze to remove excess moisture. Mix oil, fresh thyme, and red chili flake. Add the eggplant. Layer the eggplant and the oil in the jars, making sure the thyme and spices are included. When you reach the top, cover completely with oil. Let sit at room temperature overnight and then place in the refrigerator, where it will keep for one month. The oil will harden when cooled, so bring to room temperature to consume and eat within one week.

Melanzane sott'olio all'eoliana

- 2 medium-sized Italian eggplants, washed and dried
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 cups white wine vinegar
- 2 cups water
- 5-10 fresh mint leaves, roughly chopped or torn
- 3-5 sprigs fresh oregano, leaves roughly chopped

- 1 teaspoon dried chile flakes (Calabrian chiles if you can get your hands on them) or 4-6 whole dried hot chiles, sliced open
- 1-2 cloves of fresh garlic, very thinly sliced
- 2-3 cups very good quality extra virgin olive oil

Slice the eggplants into rounds not more than ½ inch thick. Toss them with the salt so that they are evenly covered, and place them in a colander. Place the colander on a bowl or plate, and then place a sheet of wax paper over the eggplant. Set a few pounds of weight on top of the wax paper. Let the eggplant sit for a good 6 hours, or ideally overnight. Gently squeeze out any remaining liquid from the eggplant. In a large, non-reactive saucepan, bring the vinegar and water to a boil. In 3 or 4 batches, add the eggplant to the mixture, bring it back to a boil, and let it cook for about 3 minutes. Remove the eggplant slices to a platter lined with an absorbent dish towel or paper towels. Let them drain for about 5 minutes, turn them, then let them drain for another 5 minutes. In a minimum 1-quart capacity jar or bowl, layer the eggplant with the herbs, chiles, and garlic. Top off the layers with enough olive oil to cover the eggplant completely. Keep the eggplant refrigerated for up to a couple of weeks.

Peperoncini Sott'Olio - Hot peppers packed in oil are a wonderful way to jazz up bland foods, including the boiled meats that are a byproduct of making broth in the winter. They're also excellent for adding zest to picnic foods and also yield hot oil, which can be rather nice.

- 1 kg fresh, blemish-free hot peppers of the kind you prefer
- 250 ml white wine vinegar
- A bay leaf, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons sea salt or kosher salt (or other salt without additives)
- An onion, peeled and finely sliced (optional)
- Olive oil (see note)

Begin by putting on your gloves. Wash the peppers and pat them dry. Next, stem them, split them open lengthwise, seed them, and rib them. Put the vinegar, salt, bay leaf, and onion (if you are using it) in a pot over a brisk flame. Add the peppers and heat until the vinegar comes to a boil. Boil the peppers for 3-4 minutes, stirring them about gently. Drain them and dry them. Pack the peppers in your clean jars and fill them with olive oil, shaking the jars and tapping at their sides to dislodge air bubbles. Seal the jars, and put them on a rack in a sterilizer (or a large pot) with cold water to cover. Bring the pot to a boil and simmer the peppers for 20 minutes to sterilize them. Let the pot cool, and when you can safely dip a hand into the water remove the jars. Check the seals of the lids, and put the jars in a cool dark place. They'll be ready in a couple of weeks, and will keep for a year.

Pomodori verdi sottolio

- 1 kg. of firm and healthy green tomatoes
- Salt – enough to cover them
- White wine vinegar
- White wine
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Some garlic cloves
- Oregano

Carefully wash and dry the green tomatoes; if possible let them dry in the sun. Boil them in water for about 30 seconds. Slice the tomatoes into segments, put them in a bowl and cover with sea salt with a weighted plate over them. Leave for at least 12 hours, but if they are large and fleshy, even longer. Drain off the water which will have come out of the salted tomatoes and cover them with white wine and vinegar – the proportions should be 2/3 vinegar and 1/3 wine). Let them stay in this for a day. Drain them well and put them in sterilized jars, mixing in some peeled garlic cloves and oregano as you wish. Cover with the extra virgin olive oil, making sure there are no air pockets. Seal the jar hermetically. For extra safety, sterilize the filled jars by boiling them for 20 minutes.

Jams, Preserves and other preparations

Eggplant and Orange jam

- 1 Kg eggplants
- 3 oranges (organic, not sprayed)
- 500 gram sugar

Wash the oranges well in warm water, then peel them (yellow part only), cutting the zest into matchsticks and boil in a little water for about 10 minutes. Drain. Squeeze the juice out of the oranges. Peel the eggplants (if you want a more robust flavor keep the skin); chop them into small cubes and sprinkle salt all over them. Let purge for 1 hour, and then wash the eggplants in running water, squeezing them lightly. Add them into a pot with the sugar the zest and the juice from the oranges. Cook on medium high flame for about 50 minutes and bottle in sterilized jars while still hot.

Eggplant relish

This particular jam can be used with boiled meats or aged cheeses.

- 600 gram eggplant
- 1 Kg sugar
- 1 orange biocultivated
- 100 gram pistachios
- 200 gram dry apricots
- 1 pinch cinnamon (ground in a mortar)
- salt

Clean and skin the eggplants, cube them and put in a colander sprinkled with salt to render their water for a good 20 minutes. Rinse the salt off and dry them with kitchen towels. Peel completely the orange (including the white skin covering the fruit sections) reserving any juice, then cut in small pieces. In a heavy bottom pan add the eggplant cubes, sugar, the pieces of orange with their juice, the pistachio roughly broken, the dry apricots cut in small pieces and the cinnamon. Mix well and let cook for about 90 minutes, until you reach a thick consistency. Take the clean jars out of the oven and fill them with the jam. Close the lids and upturn the jars, covering them - with a woolen cloth possibly - until they are cold.

Carrot Jam

- 1 kg Carrots small and tender
- 500 gram Sugar
- 2 Lemons zest and juice
- 1 small glass Cognac or Rum

Wash and clean the carrots. Put them in a pot; add the juice of the lemons and enough water to barely cover them. Partially close the pot with its lid and cook. When the carrots are cooked, drain them and pass them in a vegetable mill, putting the pure in a casserole. Add the sugar, at the grated zest of the 2 lemons, put back on the stove and let boil at very low flame till the jam will have the correct consistency. Turn off the flame, let cool a little and stir in the cognac. Immediately add to the sterilized jars and let cool without closing with the lids but surrounding the jars with kitchen towels. Once cooled close with the lids and keep in a cool, dry and dark place. It is best to wait about 1 month before starting using it.

Tomato jam

- 2 kg ripe tomatoes
- 1,250 kg sugar
- 2 lemons
- 1 apple

- ½ glass grappa
- 1 drop vanilla

Cut the tomatoes into pieces and add to a casserole with the sugar and the grated zest and juice of the lemons. Boil it till the tomatoes liquefy, then pass through a mill. Return to the casserole, add the apple chopped into small pieces and let cook again till it has the right consistency, and then add the vanilla and grappa. Immediately divide between the sterilized jars, close the lids and upturn them, covering with a woolen cloth possibly, until they are cold.

Sweet Potatoes Jam

- 1 kg sweet potatoes
- 400 gram sugar
- zest of 1 lemon
- Piece of cinnamon stick
- Piece of or small vanilla bean
- 1 spoon fool bitter cocoa powder
- 1 small glass cognac

Cook the sweet potatoes, without peeling them, in salted water for about 20 minutes. In another casserole make syrup with the sugar and 250 grams of water. Drain the sweet potatoes, pass them through a ricer and add the puree to the syrup. Mix well and add the other ingredients, except for the cognac. Cook for about 1 hour on low flame, then take out the vanilla and cinnamon and add the cognac. Mix well and bottle in sterilized jars making sure that you do not leave any air pockets in the jam.

Artichoke Puree

- ½ kg. artichokes
- broth
- extra virgin olive oil
- 4-5 potatoes.

Clean the artichokes and eliminate the hard outer leaves. Cut in halves and eliminate the inside fluff putting each artichoke piece immediately in some water acidulated with lemon. Once finished, drain the water and put the artichokes in some broth, together with the potatoes. Boil the potatoes till done, about 30 minutes or a little less and take them out from the broth, while you let the artichokes continue cooking. Once tender pass all vegetables through a mill. Add some salt and put the puree in a piece of cheesecloth to drain. Once dried (no more liquid seeps out) put the puree in sterilized jars covering the top of each jar with some olive oil. Close the lids and sterilize the jars as you normally would.

Green tomatoes Jam

- 1 kg green tomatoes
- 600 gr. Sugar
- 1 lemon
- 1 stick cinnamon

Clean and slice the tomatoes. Put them in a container with the sugar and let them rest overnight as this will prevent the sugar from burning. Strain the tomatoes and boil the formed liquid, once boiling, add back the tomatoes, the juice of 1 lemon and the cinnamon. Let cook of low heat till the tomatoes become translucent, nearly candied. Pour the jam in sterilized jars and sterilize for 30 minutes.

Fruit-nut liqueur

- 250g apricot nuts
- 250g plum nuts

- A few peach nuts
- 1 liter 190 alcohol
- 300gr sugar
- 3 dl water

Crack the nuts of the apricot and plums and chop the seeds, leave whole the peach nuts. In a jar, put all the nuts with the alcohol and let macerate for 5 months in a dark space. Then prepare a syrup with the water and sugar and add it to the infusion. Filter and bottle. It will be better to let it affinate for at least 2 months before tasting.

Mostarda di frutta

- 1 k fruit
- 500 g sugar
- The juice of an orange
- Mustard essence, or powdered mustard and white wine

The best known mostarda in Italy is Mostarda di Cremona, which is made with a mixture of peeled, cored fruit: If the fruit is small sized, the presentation is much nicer if you leave the fruit whole (pit what needs pitting), or at the most cut in half lengthwise. If you instead use larger fruit, cut it up as necessary. When you have finished preparing your fruit, weigh it, and add the sugar. Figure at least a half pound of sugar per pound of fruit, and you can increase the amount if the fruit is not too sweet, or you want a sweeter mostarda. After adding the sugar, pour the juice of the orange over it. Let the fruit rest for 24 hours, gently turning the pieces a couple of times. The next day the sugar will be completely dissolved.

Set a colander in a pot and upend the bowl into it. Drain the fruit well and return it to the bowl. Heat the syrup over a medium flame, reduce the heat some when it comes to a boil, and continue boiling it until its volume is reduced by half. Skim the foam from the surface with a slotted spoon or strainer, and pour the syrup back over the fruit. The sugar in the concentrated syrup will extract more moisture from the fruit, which will begin to firm up. Concentrate the syrup a second time and steep the fruit in it overnight again. You are now ready to flavor your mostarda, and you have two options (but, in either case, you will also need sterilized jars at this point):

Use **Mustard Oil**, which is clear and thus doesn't cloud the syrup. It is, however, difficult to find, because it's a powerful irritant. Your best bet will be to visit an herbalist, who will likely have to order it for you. Drain the fruit into a pot again, and remove about a shot glass's worth of syrup from the pot. Set the pot to heating, and in the meantime carefully add 10-15 drops of mustard oil to the syrup in the shot glass. If you spill a drop or get some on your skin, wash it off immediately with warm soapy water. After adding the fruit, if you are using mustard oil, pour it in, and then add hot concentrated syrup to cover, tapping the jar repeatedly to dislodge air bubbles as you fill.

Use **Powdered Mustard**, much easier to find than mustard oil, and also much safer to work with. You'll want a 2-ounce (50 g) can. Dissolve it in a cup of wine in a small pot, and gently heat the mixture over a low flame. Stir occasionally, and let the mixture bubble for a few minutes. While you are preparing the infusion, drain the fruit and concentrate the syrup once again. While the syrup is concentrating, sterilize your jars in boiling water, and then fill them with the fruit. Don't be surprised at how much the fruit has compacted; starting with 1 k of fruit, all of it will finally fit into 1 500 ml jar. Add the infusion and then the hot syrup to cover, tapping jar to dislodge air bubbles as you fill. Cover the jars, wipe them clean, and put them on a cool dark shelf in your pantry. The mostarda will be ready in 2 week's time. There's no need to sterilize the mostarda; the sugar concentration is high enough that it will inhibit bacterial activity.