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# STRAWBERRIES ARE A JOY

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BY CHEF JOANNA SABLE



**Strawberries** are a joy. They are the first really sweet and juicy sign that spring has sprung. Sure you have fiddleheads and asparagus, even peas, but strawberries, wow.

For me strawberries mean only one thing. Local Ontario jam made with fresh from the farm berries, sugar, balsamic vinegar and black pepper.

Yes, you heard right. I put funny things in my jam. Why? Because way back the Italians had this cool idea of sprinkling a little very old, very fancy balsamic vinegar and cracking black pepper on them. You actually don't taste the vinegar and pepper but it makes the strawberries, well, strawberry!

Now the really cool thing about jam other than the fact that you get to make it and in the dead of winter taste summer is that it is really good for you and not expensive.

When you make jam it is best to use what we in the biz call "seconds". These fruits are a little over ripe and a bit soft. These fruits are way better for jamming because they have lost some of their moisture and so the flavour is concentrated. Often if you go to a farmers market towards the end of the day the farmers will give you what is left at a much discounted price. The other alternative is to make friends with a farmer and order seconds the way I do.

Any and all fruits make great jam and they are fun to mix and match. The basic ratio is 50% fruit to 50% sugar. This is important because sugar is your only preservative. Now is the fun part. To strawberries you can add a few spoons of cocoa powder, fresh chopped mint or vanilla bean.

Peaches and apricots love cinnamon, star anise and ginger.

A mixed berry jam is delicious with a good squeeze of lemon.

I also just love making savoury jams also known as chutney. I think savoury jam just sounds more modern and the twists I like to take do modernize the jams. These are to be eaten with salumi, cheeses, grilled meats, fish or fowl. You too can try this just by adding some chopped onion, garlic and chilli to any yellow coloured fruit. Try apricots with mustard seeds, cider vinegar and sugar. Peaches are delightful with onions, chilli and dried cranberries.

When making jam it is super important to follow safety rules so look up a good recipe, not for the recipe but for the handling. That means great sterilizing of jars, filling to the correct levels and knowing when the little "belly button" on the top of the jar has become an "inny" and is safe to store.

But, then again...you can always make freezer jam, delicious stuff – and you can avoid processing. Great if you have an extra basement freezer..

Enjoy jamming and preserving. Never think you need to make a ton. A few pints will make a few jars and this will be a special treat. I promise.

I am very passionate about doing my best to eat local and support local, small farmers. I think you should give it a go too.

Eat well, Joanna. HL

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Joanna Sable is a Cordon Bleu chef, canner of all things local and President of J. Sable Consults.