

Lochac

Herb & Garden Guild



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Another edition

Thanks to the Celestial Lotus Tea House (Wei Ming Cheng) for hosting a Guild gathering at Rowany Festival. It was great to catch up with everyone.

We have since advertised for a Head Gardener, but nobody took it up. Let me know if you are interested.

In the meantime, please enjoy the new edition.

Master Cristoval, Guild Chronicler

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Patron

The patron of the guild is Master Seger Boom.

Lavandula flore caruleo.
Common Lauander.



Gerard's Herbal

Making Garum

By Lady Mael Muire ingen Alpin

I love food, especially strongly flavoured food. Garum is something that I've been wanting to try making for a while. I've read quite a few different sources, whilst not yet bothering to go back to the primaries and my almost non existent Latin yet.

I wanted to try actually making some and seeing whether it's something that I like and want to experiment with further, or something that's going to get buried on the farthest corner of the property and never spoken of again.

As with the name of the product itself (garum, liquamen, muria, haemation, allec/x), the recipe seems to have varied both geographically and temporally.

I have included a very comprehensive Web page I found as a good starting point:

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/encyclopaed.../wine/garum.html>

Recipe

For my garum, I used:

- 500g of whole sardines
- 90g salt
- oregano (specifically mentioned when making garum from mackerel)
- rosemary
- parsley
- chives
- one lonely green chilli that my toddler picked and I know it's of the New World but it's been looking at me.



The fish have to be whole; the blood and guts are key components. The very best liquamen was made of only the fresh blood, gills and guts of fish like Tuna. However small fish seem to be very commonly used whole, with the meat and bones. The process of production is not putrefaction by bacteria, but digestion by gut enzymes. No gut, no enzymes. The quantity of salt seems to range from 1/8th to 1/4th of the fish with 18% being the sweet spot.



I layered the herbs on the bottom as per one recipe I found. Then I diced up the sardines. At minimum the gut should be slashed. The fresher the fish the better, but this being Canberra I had to take what I could get. All of the fish goes on; head, fins, gills, guts, random icky bits. I layered the chunks of fish with the salt.

Now to hide it somewhere warm where hubby won't complain too much. Traditional methods left the jar in the sun. Heat helps the enzymes function. Instructions are to stir daily and strain in two months. The liquid becomes the liquamen, and the remaining goo was retained (and possibly dried) as a fish paste called Allec or Alex.



My first instinct was to bin the lot, but then I paused and wondered how the Romans dealt with the issue. After a bit of reading, as far as I can tell they didn't. Some garum instructions clearly say that the pot should be left open to the sun to aid in the fermentation. So there must have been maggots.

Further googling reveals that maggots are very much a thing in the production of those lovely, neat bottles of golden-brown fish sauce in the supermarket. Apparently it's one of those things you just don't talk about outside of the industry.

So the pot has had its daily stir and been banished to the pile of tractor equipment at the far end of the house paddock.

Disclaimer: I'm a pathology scientist. I don't gross out easily. However I am definitely pasteurising this before I try it.

Day 3

24hrs later, the level of solids in the pot has dropped noticeably, and if you look at the top left you can see that fluids are beginning to pool in the bottom.

I will own up to having a cold but there was no noticeable smell when I removed the lid. Yet.



Day 2: Maggots!

Yep, I opened the pot for its morning stir and there were maggots. I took a picture but I'll leave it out.



Food safety is a very good question. In theory the quantity of salt should stop the growth of bacteria. In practice cooking it to above 70°C for more than 15 minutes (pasteurisation) should destroy any bacteria and that's probably what I'll do before using it.

Thomasina's Kitchen

Flower Tarts

Recipe redactions by Mistress Thomasina Coke

Tarts of flowers were prepared during spring and summer. Cowslips, primroses, or marigold petals were beaten small and combined with eggs and cream or curds, and then baked in a pastry case.

Recipes

The following recipes are from: *A Proper newe Booke of Cokerye* (England, mid-16th c.)

To make a tarte of borage floures

Take borage floures and perboyle them tender, then strayne them wyth the yolckes of three or foure egges, and swete curdes, or els take three or foure apples, and perboyle wythal and strayne them with swete butter and a lyttle mace and so bake it.

Take borage flowers and parboil them tender / then strain them with the yolks of three or four eggs and sweet curds / or else take three or four apples and parboil with all and strain them with sweet butter and a little mace and so bake it.



To make a tarte of marigoldes prymroses or couslips

Take the same stuffe to euery of them that you do to the tarte of borage and the same ceasonynge.

To make a tart of marigolds, primroses, or cowslips. Take the same stuff to every of them that you do to the tart of borage flowers and the same seasoning.



Pastry

The pastry recipe is from the same source but redacted by Daniel Myers and can be found at medievalcookery.com:

Most of the pie crust recipes from the 15th century are tacked on to the end of the recipe for some kind of pie filling. They're usually very simple mixtures of flour and water, and often don't call for any fat.

This 16th century recipe is one of the earliest that is strictly for making short crust pastry. The addition of eggs and saffron give it a wonderful flavour.

Short paest for tartes

To make short paest for tarte. Take fyne floure and a cursey of fayre water and a dysche of swete butter and a lyttel saffron, and the yolckes of two egges and make it thynne and as tender as ye maye.

To make a shortcrust pastry for a tart, take fine flour and a cursey of fair water and a dish of sweet butter and a little saffron and the yolks of two eggs and make it as thin and as soft as you like.

Myers doesn't provide a modern recipe, so use your preferred shortcrust recipe.

Preserving the Harvest

by THL Melissa Wijffels

Testing Varro's legume storage method

Bean Weevils

Pests damage crops in the field, but can also be a serious problem in storage – total losses were not unheard of.

While grains have many enemies (rodents, fungi, insects), legumes tend to fare better in storage. However, they are often attacked by weevils.

This group of beetles lays their eggs on beans and peas with a moderate moisture content, and the larvae then develop inside of the seed, hollowing it out from the inside – this damage is particularly insidious as the damage is invisible until they emerge as adults, at which point a bore-hole in the peas or beans becomes apparent.



Figure 1: Bean with two bore holes from bean weevil

When my first crop of beans got attacked by the bean weevil, I was surprised (and dismayed!), as I'd never encountered this pest before.

If you find this creature, do not do what I did and say "only a few were damaged, I'll float them out when I use them". The bean weevil can have many generations in storage, resulting in a nearly 100% attack rate if left unchecked!

Their respiration in sealed containers can cause condensation followed by mould, which can completely destroy your harvest.

Approaches

While bean weevils can be dealt with by freezing dried legumes prior to storage, this is only practical for small quantities, and would not have been accessible for historical legume storage.

I was reading through Varro's agricultural treatise *De Re Rustica* at the time, and ran across this advice:

Varro 1:57 "*Beans and other legumes are kept safe for a long time in oil jars covered in ashes.*"

Experiment

Heartened, I ran an experiment with the next season's harvest. I mixed all of the beans together for drying, and when they were sufficiently dry, divided them equally into two jars – one containing only beans (the control), and one where I added wood ash to the beans.

The beans in question are native to the Americas, but this weevil attacks both old and new world species, so were a reasonable test for this method – additionally, I was certain that the beans were infested given my experience from growing them the previous season!

I then let the beans sit in the cupboard for 12 months with their lids slightly ajar to examine the amount of weevil damage in each container.



Figure 2: Beans stored with and without wood ash after 12 months in storage

Results

There was some obvious weevil activity in the control jar, but it was more difficult to say what was going on in the jar with ashes.

However, when the two were sieved and floated (Figure 3), it became very obvious that there was a substantial difference between the two options!

The jar with ashes had 3 weevils in it, all dead, and the jar without ashes had dozens and dozens, and many of the beans had holes. Weevils came out of the sieve as well as floating to the top of the water in the control jar (Figure 4).

Conclusion

The results of this bit of experimental archaeology are quite clear – the method prescribed by Varro is extremely effective in preventing damage to stored legumes by weevils.



Figure 4: Close-up of the above image showing bean weevils floating in water of the beans stored without ashes - over 10 are visible in this image alone.



Figure 3: Beans floated in water. Ashes (left) and control (right). The pinpoints of light on the surface of the righthand image are all bean weevils.

Baroness Buttercup

by Baroness Juliana de Northwood

Gardening on an apartment balcony or a windowsill

Part 2 - Planning your balcony garden

It all starts with planning. Lots of planning, research, and decisions. You'll want a notebook, a pen, and a tape measure.

Light

Start with an assessment of the light.

- Where does the sun rise during the year? (Winter and Summer)
- How much shadow does the wall cast?
- Will the light on my balcony support the plants I want to grow?

With these three questions answered the rest is fairly straightforward.

In my case, the sun comes directly East, is dappled through eucalyptus trees, lasts for about three hours, and is gone off the front of the balcony by 09:30am year round because of the deep eaves.

As I had some surviving planters, I placed them first, and they all got moved around a lot in the early days of living here. The plants all stopped pouting and started growing when I eventually found the right microclimates for them.

My rose bush needed the most light, so it went into a corner that gets five hours or so of direct sun, or at least the brightest shade of all.

All of the herbs went onto the front balcony wall, as did the succulents. I still haven't identified what the pineapple really needs, but it seems to be growing ok for now.

The mint didn't do so well near the rose, so it got moved to the opposite end of the balcony where it receives only early morning sun for about an hour, and it now looks luxurious.

You may need to resign yourself that your ideal placement may not be what your plant really needs. This rotation of locations will inform which type of pots or containers you eventually choose,

because moving a 30L, 9kg plastic pot with soil and plant is easier than moving the same size ceramic pot, where just the pot can come in at 10kg or more without the plant or soil.



The third question will be answered when you try to grow something and it either works or doesn't. Sometimes, you can't know until you have tried, and I have tried a lot.

In my case, I learned pretty quickly that my existing light conditions won't support the food plants. No matter how hard I tried, I ultimately had more failures than successes. I couldn't get enough light to even grow silverbeet! And I had grown it in a south-facing in-ground garden bed in New Zealand.

So, I changed focus. I did a lot of research and discovered that the best plants for my Easterly exposure are orchids of all things. They like early morning sun, dappled light, or bright shade. I have all those things, so perfect.

But if you have more than five hours of sunlight, and can protect your plants from burning in the blistering late afternoon westerly sun and drying winds, then the world is your oyster.

Containers

The next thing to think about is your containers, and if you need to elevate them to access the available light. Containers come in any number of sizes, shapes, and price points.

My previous balcony had a tinted glass wall that provided 50% shade. The current balcony has a brick wall 1.2 metres high. So, I cannot place planters directly on the ground.

You will need to consider the height, width, and length of the container, and whether or not it will fit in the desired space. Measure the space, and then measure the desired pots to ensure it will fit, but also leave enough space to easily move around it, so that you can plant easily, reach, and also empty it out if you need to do that. Bending over hurts.

You may need to elevate your pots so the plants get access to the light. Any kind of table, shelf or flat surface that can bear the weight will do. I have seen succulents planted in the shallow frame of an old style chair. Facebook marketplace, garage sales, carboot sales, second hand stores, all have items that would work well as a plant stand. It just needs to fit into your space.

If you can, you could also screw in some appropriate suspension hooks into the ceiling or mount hanging brackets to a wall. You can hang

your tomato in an attractive pot, and grow it as a hanging plant. The ultimate space saver, and stops birds landing on your pots and feasting on your dinner ingredients.

Plastic

Pros - this is by far the most common, cheap, and easily accessible. Comes in many colours to choose from. Lightweight, and portable. There are literally hundreds of styles, colours, sizes, and prices.

Cons - The smaller the pot, the more frequently you will have to water it. They are not always UV stable, and are generally not recyclable.

If you have the space and budget, and want to spend several hundred dollars, you can have a VegPod™ which has an integrated pest cover net, fittings for irrigation, and come in three handy sizes to fit into a variety of spaces. It's on legs, so no bending over. Just ensure there is space to lift the arch shaped lid. The height of the lid should be added to the depth of the space required.

Terracotta

Using terracotta is a more expensive option. I prefer terracotta, as it is an aesthetic for me.

Even when I had large planters, I preferred the Northcote terracotta coloured 80L planter. Terracotta is lovely, it is earthenware, and if it breaks, you can use the pieces as drainage crocks, or pound it back into dust and use it as grit in your worm farm.

Pros - Natural materials, porous, can be expensive, look beautiful, won't tip over.

Cons - larger pots can be heavy, will break if you drop them. Need to water more often because of porosity.

Ceramic

These are similar to the terracotta, but are heavier, and tend to be glazed pots.

Pros - Their benefits are they come in many different colours and designs, and are very beautiful. They don't dry out as fast as terracotta, so hold the moisture.

Cons - They are heavy, which means they won't blow over, but that also makes them difficult to move, unless you put them on dolly wheels.

Concrete

Pros - Beautiful, great for small fruit-trees.

Cons - Large, heavy, very expensive.

They are also expensive, often getting up into the hundreds of dollars for some of the larger, designer varieties. I have a single small 8L concrete pot, and it is 5kg on its own. Once this growing season is done, the pot is being disposed of.

Textiles

These round bags are referred to as growbags, and have many advantages, and very few disadvantages. They can be purchased in packs of 10 for about \$20 at Bunnings.

They come in many sizes, sometimes they can be found in fashion colours, and they are reasonably inexpensive. Often sustainable, as they are made out of recycled plastic fabrics, and last a long time. They are permeable, which means that plant roots will sense air and grow down, rather than around in circles, that often leads to some plants becoming pot-bound. They are very light, except for the weight of the soil, and are easy to move around, with built in handles. They store flat, so take up less storage space.

Kevin Espiritu of Epic Gardening has written a book about grow-bag gardening, which is worth a read. His homestead has an entire garden section built from grow bags, including a dwarf lemon tree in one of them. They tend to be deep, so will work for root vegetables, and he has even grown roses in them.

Pros - These things fold up and store flat, and come in many different sizes.

Cons - These do require some sort of base like a pallet underneath, to allow for good drainage.

Their downside is that while they are made from recycled plastic textiles, they are themselves not recyclable. At least at the time of writing.

Polystyrene

Pros - Often acquired free from grocery stores, and makes for a great small-scale vegetable garden to start with, recyclable if cleaned

Cons - Petrochemical, ugly.

Wire Baskets with coconut coir mats

Usually for hanging baskets, but if the basket has a flat base, it can sit on a shelf of some kind.

Pros - beautiful, reusable, great for hanging vines such as cucumbers, tomatoes, pollinator-attracting insect flowers e.g. Petunias, pansies, or even tomatoes and cucumbers, space saving.

Cons - can be expensive, coconut fibre mats leak if a water management/capture system is not in place.

Drainage

One other thing to look at is the contact point between the pot and the saucer. If the pot is very flat bottomed and there is very little air space at the drainage holes, the water level in the saucer will be the same in the pot, essentially submersing the bottom layer of soil in water. This can cause the soil to breakdown and become sulphuric, leading to an increasingly toxic environment. Ask me how I worked this out.

You may need to consider a way of elevating the pot off the saucer to allow the water to drain freely and evaporate away by raising the pot using spacers of some sort, or adding drainage gravel into the bottom of the pot. Or both! I do both.

My pots

I have a mixture of pots. Some I have bought, and others I have been given. I use self-watering, window planter boxes for my herbs, a large plastic self-watering pot each for my rose and mint, and am slowly swapping to terracotta for all my orchids as opportunity allows. I have many still in the plastic nursery pots, which are not a long term solution.

Plants do need growing space. Even the orchids which like to be rootbound, need new shoes from time to time.

Just remember, go easy at first. Once you have plants in pots, you are going to have to find a place in your life and build a schedule to accommodate your garden, no matter how small, and you are going to have to water your balcony garden by hand if you are like me and do not have a hose connection on your balcony.

Broadbeans

by Master Seger Boom

A brief history and some experimentation with period methods.

Lately I have been doing most of my gardening at my local Singleton Community Garden in the Hunter Valley of NSW.

Last year we grew four large patches of broad beans (roughly 2m x 2m). I took this opportunity to explore the growing of broad beans from a desire to grow with minimal inputs and an interest in medieval cultivation.



An image from the *Tacuinum Sanitatis in Medicina*, c1398 manuscript (Codex Vindobonensis S.N. 2644),

The plant

The beans of the species *Vicia faba* can be broken down into varieties based on size and use. Larger seeds tend to be classified as broad beans or in the USA as fava beans.

Smaller beans (*Vicia faba equinus*) are often known as horse beans. They have long been used as animal feed.

Tick beans are a smaller variety again which has frequently being used for a field crop.

Broad bean history

Unlike many species of domesticated plant the wild ancestor of broad beans has not been discovered (Rottenburg 2020).

In the 11th century before present, pre-pottery neolithic B village and an Early Chalcolithic village (Wadi Rabah culture): 270 *Vicia faba* seeds were

recovered from plastered floors. More were found in pits at a site at Ahihud in Israel (Caracuta et al 2017).

At Yiftahel neolithic site in northern Israel, charred seeds of *Vicia faba* were excavated from an agricultural site dating to the seventh millennium BCE (Kislev 1985).

In neolithic and early bronze age Britain (ca. 4000–1500 BCE), evidence of the broad bean is rare but they have been found as impressions in pottery and as charred fragments found amongst charred wheat and spelt. All of the remains dating from this period were found close to the coast of southern Britain (Treasure et al 2017).

In a study undertaken of celtic beans in Britain it was found that cultivation and manuring practices may have been present at a site in Dorset, middle bronze age. This site demonstrated large beans and barley grains. (Treasure et al 2017)

Some time between 118-1180 in the riverside town of Braničevo in eastern Serbia, a house burnt down. Amongst the remains were 333 charred *Vicia faba* seeds (broad beans) which were found in a ceramic storage jar. The lack of outer pods and the location of the storage being within the house indicates that they were intended for human and not animal consumption (Smuk 2021).

Gerards Herbal (1597) says:

The.. bean is sown in fields and gardens everywhere about London - The Garden Bean is called in Latin Faba: in English, the Garden Bean: the Field Bean is of the same kind and name, although the fertility of the soil hath amended and altered the fruit into a greater form. So saith our author, but the difference between the Garden and Field Bean is a specific difference, and not an accidental one caused by the soil, as every one that knoweth them may well perceive.

Selecting an appropriate variety

Broad beans are delicious and I look forward to being able to eat them fresh every year during late winter and spring. Increasingly shorter winters and

warmer springs have led me to look for a variety which will be more reliable in years that are warmer.

Finding period types or being able to find a date for the introduction of this variety would have been ideal.

The earliest variety I was able to find a date for the earliest was “Martock”, reputed to have been grown in the palace of the bishop of Bath and Wells since at least Tudor times (Curry 2019). Unfortunately I have not found Martock bean seeds for sale in Australia.

I selected an heirloom variety called Egyptian (also called foul misri), a variety often used for Egyptian falafel and known for heat resistance and ability to withstand strong winds.



Planting results

I followed the instructions from the 1393 manuscript “Le menagier de Paris”.

From All Saints’ Day bog beans can be grown, but to insure they don’t freeze, plant them around Christmas and in January and February and at the beginning of March. Planting them at different times means that some are lost to frost, others are not. When they come up, as soon as they sprout, you should till them and break the first shoot; and when they have six leaves, cover them with soil.

Planting the crop spaced out over time gives some insurance against adverse weather conditions and pest infestations.

In one season, it was possible to collect enough beans for a larger planting the following year. Of course, I didn’t get to try many until the second year!

We have continued to follow this example in this year’s planting. Breaking the first stem as it forms does make for a bushier plant, however even those stems which weren’t broken were still multi stemmed. This may be a feature of newer varieties?

Overall the trial was a success, we harvested around 4kg of dried beans and a large but unknown quantity of fresh beans. All were delicious.



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Sources for Plants (Australia)

by Master Cristoval

Where can I get the weird and wonderful things from?

Introduction

One of the best things the Guild can do is share information. Here's my favourite sources for plants.

These are east coast websites; some things can't be sent to WA.

Diggers Club

Pretty much any gardener should join the [Diggers Club](#), but you do have to join.

Their plants are aimed at the home gardener and so tend to feature dwarf fruit trees (often must be staked). They have a wide range at very good prices, are good for unusual varieties and colours but not so good for weird plants that only the most dedicated will look for.

When they do feature rare plants, I know from experience that not everything is a good idea. My previous farm had a fine tree of some sort of inedible weird quince thing; maybe it was OK roasted but I never got around to trying it.

Daley's

[This](#) is a serious fruit tree nursery, with a big range of quality plants. Not always particularly cheap.

Herb Cottage

[Here](#). I've found them to have good prices for unusual things. I bought golden oregano,

perpetual spinach, angelica and society garlic from them.

Green Harvest

[Here](#). I used to use them a lot, but their range has become a lot smaller. Good prices for seeds.

Mudflower

[Here](#). Quirky semi-professional place with some interesting items including skirrets, at very good prices.

Provenance Growers

[Here](#). A lot like Mudflower, with a flashier website. They sometimes have Good King Henry seed.

Midsummer Herbs

[Here](#). Great for the weirder herbs and perennial vegetables.

Renaissance Herbs

[Here](#). Actually a wholesaler rather than a retailer, but you can find things here and then locate the nearest stockist. Good for herbs and flowers.

Who do you use?

Please write in with your favourite suppliers.

Can anyone write this article for NZ?