

## PRESERVING WITH FOWLER'S VACOLA – THE FRUIT OF OBSESSION

Growing up in rural Victoria, I was always impressed by a healthy stash of full Fowlers bottles. The rows of brightly coloured jars lined up on shelves and in pantries awaiting the onset of winter before they could be eagerly consumed inspired me no end.

Why then has it taken me so long to catch on?

Not until Jen and Pete, my tree changer friends in Victoria, served me bottled plums from their garden for breakfast last winter was I galvanised into action. Then I became slightly obsessed.

In my first season I managed to fill no less than 100 bottles with tomatoes in various states, peaches, nectarines, plums and even garlic. How much can one person eat? Thank goodness for dear friends all of whom had a Fowlers thrust into their hands at regular intervals. With promises of restraint (ha ha) this season I've already stashed away 50 jars and show no signs of flagging. I hope you all like fruit.

### A Bit of History

The Fowler's Vacola method of reserving is uniquely Australian and was developed by Joseph Fowler in the Melbourne suburb of Camberwell in 1915.

An English migrant, Fowler was amazed at the produce available in Australia and sought to preserve it in the days before domestic refrigeration or supermarkets.

The Fowlers method relies on the natural acidity of fruits and the process of heating steadily to a temperature of 92C over one hour to achieve a sterile and safe product.

The original preserving method used a stove top boiler and a thermometer to achieve correct temperatures for specified periods of time. This was a very successful method although laborious but these days the kits are all electric and very easy to use.

Fowler's jars are heat resistant and the rubber rings, lids and clips allow for air to escape during heating process and then create a vacuum seal once cooled.

### The Basic Process

Two preserving units are available; the Simple Natural Preserving unit and the larger

Professional Preserving unit both of which include a full instruction booklet.

- Select the appropriate sized jar for the fruit to be processed, wide necks for large fruit, narrow necks for smaller fruit.
- Cut the fruit into pieces or halves and pack firmly into the clean jars adding liquid/syrup as you go to help minimise air pockets.
- Fill the jar with liquid to within 12mm of the top.
- Apply the rubber ring to the neck of the jar making sure that it has no twists in it.
- Place the lid on and then secure it with the corresponding sized clip.
- Place the bottles into the preserving unit and fill with cold water.
- Turn on the preserving unit and allow to process for one hour (with the exception of larger bottles which need 70 minutes).
- Drain out sufficient water to be able to remove the bottles and then carefully do so as not to disturb the seal.
- Allow to cool and then after 18 hours remove the clip. Store the jars in a cool dark place.

Fruit in Fowler's jars will last up to one year.

### Benefits of Preserving

Fruit can be preserved at its peak of freshness and ripeness.

Less than perfect fruit, which often has superior flavour due to not being picked, can be utilised thus avoiding unnecessary wastage.

The amounts of sugar can be controlled to suit your own tastes and preferences.

The jars are reusable so there are no tins or plastic containers to be disposed of.

Local produce can be enjoyed year round AND you will be the envy of your friends.

### **Ideas for Preserving**

These are possibilities.

Gluhwein Pears - pears in red wine syrup with cinnamon, orange and cloves

Stone fruits in light to medium syrup

Plums in syrup with spices

Figs with vanilla bean

Poached quince with orange

Stewed apple for pies etc

Tomatoes with extra virgin oil and red wine vinegar

Roast tomato sauce

Slow roasted garlic

Caramelised onions

Mitre10 are stockists of Fowler's Vacola products.

Jars can also often be found in second hand shops and at organisations such as The Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul. Clearing sales are also good places to find jars and many Fowler's items are available on eBay.

### **Happy Preserving**