

At Nonna's Table by Paola Bacchia
Recipes excerpted for Downtime

At **NONNA'S**



TABLE

ONE ITALIAN
FAMILY'S
RECIPES,
SHARED
WITH LOVE

**Paola
Bacchia**



Crostata with jam

CROSTATA DI MARMELLATA

The simplest of all my mother's cakes and tarts, crostata makes good use of all the jam we had in the pantry. My school friend Jo, who came over most weekends to play, often recounts her memory of our crostata. Mamma would reach up to the high shelf of the pantry and, as if by magic, reveal a perfectly latticed crostata, made with apricot or plum jam for our afternoon tea.

SERVES 8–10

140 g (5 oz) unsalted butter, chilled, plus extra butter for greasing

280 g (10 oz) plain (all-purpose) flour, plus extra for dusting

50 g (13/4 oz) sugar

1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt

zest of 1/2 lemon

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 egg, cold from the fridge

1–2 teaspoons chilled water

370 g (13 oz) Apricot jam (see page 198) **[see below]** or Red plum jam (see page 202)

[see below], chilled

Cut the butter into small dice and place in the fridge until ready to use.

Grease the base and side of a 28 cm (11 inch) round loose-based flan (tart) tin with butter.

Line the base with baking paper.

Place the flour, sugar, salt and butter in a food processor. Pulse until the mixture resembles coarse sand. Add the lemon zest and vanilla. With the motor going, break in the egg and add enough chilled water until the pastry comes together and forms a ball. Tip onto a well-floured work surface and knead briefly to shape the ball into a disc. Break off one-third of the pastry, roll into a thick strip, wrap in baking paper and place in the fridge. Roll the remaining two-thirds of the pastry into a 32 cm (12 1/2 inch) circle, about 3–4 mm (1/6 inch) thick.

Using the rolling pin to help you, lift the pastry over your tart tin and press it into the base and side of the tin. You will need to work fairly quickly, or the butter will soften too much. Trim the side so it sits about 1 cm (1/2 inch) above the pastry base, reserving the pastry scraps for the lattice top, if needed. Cover the tin with a clean cloth, then place in the fridge to chill.

Remove the remaining pastry third from the fridge and roll out on a well-floured surface to a thickness of 3–4 mm (1/6 inch). Cut into 10 strips, about 1.5 cm (1/2 inch) wide; you may need to re-roll your pastry scraps a few times. Some strips should be longer and some shorter for the lattice on your tart.

Preheat the oven to 160°C (320°F) fan-forced while you assemble the crostata.

Remove the tart tin from the fridge and evenly spread the jam over the base; I like to cut any larger pieces of fruit that I find in the jam. Next, make a lattice pattern with the pastry strips, trimming the excess.

Bake for 40–45 minutes, or until the pastry has turned golden. Remove from the oven and leave to cool before releasing the tart from the tin.

The crostata will keep in an airtight container in the pantry for 3–4 days.

Apricot jam

MARMELLATA DI ALBICOCCHE

The notes in Mamma's jam-making book can be summarised as follows: Apricot 750 g (1 lb 11 oz) sugar; red or black plums 900 g (2 lb) sugar; Mariposa plums 800 g (1 lb 12 oz) sugar; raspberries 850 g (1 lb 14 oz) sugar; 2 lemons per kg of fruit for raspberries; 1.5 lemons for the rest. One kilo (2 lb 3 oz) of fruit makes 4 1/2 jars of jam. She also had the weight of the different saucepans she would use.

Every year she would retrieve this important information and make jam accordingly, using the fruit from the apricot and plum trees in the backyard. Use the same proportions to scale up or down according to the amount of fruit you have.

Apricots are quite finicky in jam making; they have to be just the right ripeness. This means they should be pale, with a tinge of green, and quite firm. These usually have a good amount of natural pectin, so you will get a jam that is nicely firm. I also let the ingredients sit in the pan for a couple of hours before cooking; this draws out some of the liquid from the fruit, which helps dissolve the sugar more evenly.

MAKES ABOUT 10 × 370 ML (12 1/2 FL OZ) JARS

2 kg (4 lb 6 oz) apricots, just starting to become ripe
3 large lemons
1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) sugar

Wash the apricots well. Cut in half, removing the stones, and drop into a large saucepan on the stovetop.

Juice the lemons, reserving the pips and pulp. Place the pips and pulp on a square of muslin (cheesecloth) and tie it up tightly with a long piece of kitchen string. Add the lemon juice and sugar to the pan. Drop in the muslin bag and secure it to the pan handle with the string. Leave to sit for a couple of hours to help draw the liquid from the fruit.

About 20 minutes before you make the jam, wash your glass jars, and their lids, in hot soapy water and rinse well. Place the upturned jars and lids in an 80°C (175°F) fan-forced oven to dry for at least 20 minutes. Turn the oven off and let them sit in there until ready to use.

Place a small plate in the freezer to test the jam set and have several teaspoons ready. Back to the jam. Turn the heat on low, stirring the ingredients occasionally. Once the sugar has dissolved, turn the heat to high; the fruit will rapidly start to boil. Stir frequently so the fruit doesn't catch on the base or burn – it may spatter, so take care! After about 12 minutes of rapid boiling, you should be reaching setting point.

Remove the plate from the freezer. Carefully dip a clean teaspoon into the jam and pour it onto the plate. If the jam is thick on the plate, it is ready. If it is runny, then boil the jam for a few more minutes, return the plate to the freezer and test again with a clean teaspoon. Once you are satisfied with the jam set, turn off the heat and allow to cool for 20 minutes or so.

Carefully pour the hot jam into your jars, almost to the top, then seal. If you end up with one jar that is only partially full, store it in the fridge as soon as it has cooled down, and use that jar up first.

The hot jam in the warm sealed jars will form a vacuum that will keep the jam from spoiling. Once cool, they can be stored in the pantry for several years.

Red plum jam MARMELLATA DI SUSINE

My father had been the main jam-eater in the house, spreading his jam thickly on bread with ricotta for breakfast. Once he left us, the pantry was overflowing, so Mamma started generously handing jars to friends and family whenever they dropped by – a welcome and special sweet gift with a handwritten label.

MAKES ABOUT 10 × 370 ML (12 1/2 FL OZ) GLASS JARS

2 kg (4 lb 6 oz) red plums, preferably firm and not overly ripe
3 large lemons
1.8 kg (4 lb) sugar

Wash the plums well. Remove the stones, cutting the plums in half, and chopping any especially large ones into smaller pieces. Place in a large saucepan on the stovetop. Juice the lemons, reserving the pips and pulp. Place the pips and pulp on a square of muslin (cheesecloth) and tie it up tightly with a long piece of kitchen string. Add the lemon juice and sugar to the pan. Drop in the muslin bag and secure it to the pan handle with the string. Leave to sit for a couple of hours to help draw the liquid from the fruit.

About 20 minutes before you make the jam, wash your glass jars, and their lids, in hot soapy water and rinse well. Place the upturned jars and lids in an 80°C (175°F) fan-forced oven to dry for at least 20 minutes. Turn the oven off and let them sit in there until ready to use.

Place a small plate in the freezer to test the jam set, and have several teaspoons ready. Back to the jam. Turn the heat on low, stirring the ingredients occasionally. Once the sugar has dissolved, turn the heat to high; the fruit will rapidly start to boil. Stir frequently so the fruit doesn't catch on the base or burn – it may spatter, so take care! After about 10 minutes of rapid boiling, you should be reaching setting point.

Remove the plate from the freezer. Carefully dip a clean teaspoon into the jam and pour it onto the plate. If the jam is thick on the plate, it is ready. If it is runny, then boil the jam for a few more minutes, return the plate to the freezer and test again with a clean teaspoon.

Once you are satisfied with the jam set, turn off the heat and allow to cool for 20 minutes or so.

Carefully pour the hot jam into your jars, almost to the top, then seal.

If you end up with one jar that is only partially full, store it in the fridge as soon as it has cooled down, and use that jar up first.

The hot jam in the warm sealed jars will form a vacuum that will keep the jam from spoiling. Once cool, they can be stored in the pantry for several years.

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