

In a plum position

In conjunction with Food Hawke's Bay, this series showcases the Bay's fabulous food and asks what makes our producers and growers tick. This week, we talk to Margie Chambers from The Damson Collection



Local Fare

WHEN TOM Chambers bought his apple orchard in 1991, he also planted a hedgerow of damson plum trees.

Each year he would make damson gin and damson jam for his family and friends, and in 2006 he agreed to produce Damson products with his wife Margie. In 2009, after three years of preparation and trialling various recipes, the products were ready to go to market. The Chambers were joined by a friend and business colleague, Catherine Rusby, who undertook the sales and marketing role.

In early 2010, they won a Cuisine Artisan Award for their damson paste, and 2011 won a second Cuisine Artisan Award for their damson jam. It was also the year they got their first export order from Australia, and were a finalist in the HB Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.

Today, the business continues to grow and distributes most of its range to gourmet food stores throughout New Zealand. A smaller range has been introduced to supermarkets.

What is it about your product that says Hawke's Bay?

The richness and flavour of the



Margie Chambers and her husband have grown a fruitful business with their damson plums.

entire Damson range.

Why did you choose to produce/grow this particular product?

Damson plums are a fruit from another era. We want to bring back the great taste and flavour of an almost forgotten fruit.

How easy is it to grow/produce here?

Damsons are reasonably easy to grow in Hawke's Bay, but frosts can be a difficult time.

What is unique about it? There is a limited supply of damson plums available in New Zealand in commercial quantities.

What is its perfect accompaniment?

Lively cheeses, like a blue, with our pastes and our jelly enhances any lamb, venison or pork dish.

Why did you choose Hawke's Bay to start your business? Tom had planted a hedge row of damson plums in the early 90s on the orchard, and we already made products from the damsons for our personal use. After testing the

market, we decided to share the taste and flavour with the rest of New Zealand.

Tell us a little about your history?

The Damson Collection grew from an evening spent round our dinner table with friends. With the deliciousness of damson liqueur on our palates, the desire to introduce everyone to this fabulously flavoured fruit was too huge to ignore. Thus the decision to not only grow damsons commercially, but to cook the fruit and sell the final product, was made. In 2006 we planted our first damson orchard.

Can I grow produce this product at home and if so how? Probably not as damson plums are very hard to obtain.

What's your favourite meal?

Lamb loin, garlic mash, spinach with a damson jelly jus.

If you could take anyone in the world out to lunch who would it be? Besides my husband Tom, it would have to be chef Albert Roux.

The details

Company name: The Damson Collection

Contact person: Margie Chambers

Website: www.thedamsoncollection.co.nz

Where product can be purchased: Hastings Farmers Market, Bellatino's, Te Mata Mushrooms or online.

Our Business: Hawke's Bay is recognised internationally as a world-class fruit-producing area. It is best known for its wine-growing and apples but is also home to many other stone fruits including peaches, cherries, nectarines and plums.

