

HANDY DAMSONS

If there was a prize for most versatile plum variety, the 'Damson' would win hands down. Damsons are no good fresh – unless your sweet tooth is sour – but these small purple plums are rich in flavour. Plus, these upright trees (perfect for small gardens) are such prolific croppers that one tree is usually enough.

At The Damson Collection in Havelock North, there's nothing that Tom Chambers can't do with a 'Damson' – he even wooed his wife Margie with a bottle of his homemade plum liqueur. The Chambers' orchard is home to 400 Damson plum trees, from which they pick 3,500kg in one frantic week each February. They make jelly, jam, chocolates, coulis, cordial, paste, vinaigrette and – Tom's favourite – Damson and walnut terrine to serve with coffee or a cheeseboard. "There aren't many days when I don't eat a Damson in one form or another," says Tom.

As well as selling their delicious Damson range at the Hawke's Bay Farmers Market on Sunday mornings, in summer they also send boxes of ripe plums by post (order online at www.thedamsoncollection.co.nz).

