

Cuisine ²⁰¹⁰ artisan awards with **CAFFE L'AFFARE**

The Damson Collection

Damson Paste

Damsons, a small variety of plum, were once very popular. However, they are very tart so need to be cooked and made into jams, jellies or paste, and seem to have all but disappeared. Catherine Rusby, one of three partners in the business, has a theory. "People don't cook so much any more, so the damsons were left on the trees. They just fell to the ground and out of favour."

She finds that people from older generations who remember them well say there's nothing like damsons for a plum flavour. And indeed one of the judges noted that, saying he found the paste had a flavour like Black Doris.

The ingredients in the paste are simple: damsons, lemon juice, sugar and olive oil. As the fruit has plenty of pectin, nothing needs to be added.

The damsons are cooked the same day they are picked, in an old-fashioned method, in batches of no more than 2kg at a time, for hours until the right set is achieved. We cook by "feel", they say.

Business partner Margie Chambers does the cooking and her husband, Tom, is the orchardist. Catherine deals with sales and marketing.

The trio see the Damson Collection as leading a revival of the neglected plum. And it seems to be working. "The paste is so wonderful, it's easy to sell," says Catherine.

This luscious paste is solid enough to use on a cheeseboard and goes particularly well with blue cheese and aged cheddar, the strong flavours standing up to each other well.

It can be simply had on toast, stirred through a jus to go with game meats or into the pan drippings of a roast of lamb. Or try it as a condiment with ham or turkey.

✪ thedamsoncollection.co.nz



Margie and Tom
Chambers (left) and
Catherine Rusby