



Affectionately known in preserving circles as “Pam the Jam” and “Liz the Pickle”, both had success in their respective careers; their produce is a favourite of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and Pam recently authored the best-selling *River Cottage Handbook on Preserves*.

Jane Robinson of Tresillian House invited Pam and Liz to add to the now popular Walled Garden Cookery School courses at Tresillian. When they saw the venue, they were captivated. Pam confides: “It’s almost like having a holiday while teaching, I was gob-smacked when I saw the walled garden here.”

Another exciting thing about the course is that all the produce used is sourced directly from Tresillian. Head gardener John Harris has spent the last 20 years practising organic and moon gardening techniques to produce the best natural and most economic crops.

Joining John in the walled garden to view the selection of produce is like stepping back into the Georgian era in which the house was built. He gently describes the different fruit and vegetables, adding that due to his lunar planting schedule, he’s never had to give the plants extra water but just left it to nature’s rain and the pull of the moon on the earth’s stored moisture.

There are plenty of evocations of *The Secret Garden* at Tresillian, primarily in its surprising location just five miles outside of Newquay, entered via an unassuming driveway off a small B road. This modest entry gives nothing away of the restored grandeur of the house and grounds, hidden behind a copse of dense trees. With its very own secret walled moon garden, your visit is enchanted from the outset.

The alchemy takes place in a converted barn, which gives an intimate theatre-style setting with a mobile cooker unit laden with jars, straining contraptions, jelly bags and bowls of divine cherubim cheeked fruit and vibrant vegetables.

The recipes are seasonal and autumn courses will treat you to such treats as Gingered Courgette Jam and Plum and Cornish Russet Mincemeat, whereas with summer courses you might experiment with Loganberry Jam and Gooseberry Fruit Curd. Whichever season you are there, both Pam and Liz are keen to show you how you can make the most of one season’s fare by making the surplus or glut of produce in summer, for example, last into the leaner winter months.

We learn from Pam about “pectin power” as she explains why some preserves need more sugar added if the original fruit used is low in naturally occurring pectin. “If you want to make organic jams, you can always use the trick of grating a few hundred grams of organic Bramley apples into your mixture as a base, rather than the shop bought pectin sugar,” she says. This use of traditional knowledge to answer a modern commercial question is an exciting revelation of the day.



TOP FROM LEFT: JOHN HARRIS ENCHANTS THE GUESTS; PAM CORBIN LEFT LIZ NEWELL RIGHT; HOLDING UP THE FRUIT LEATHER; STRAINING; VEGETABLE KALEIDOSCOPE ABOVE: CHUTNEY BELOW: BOTTLED FRUIT

The fruits of hundreds of years of household and farmhouse labour are distilled into this wonderful course, and it is interesting to see how many new questions are answered with simple archaic truths, which drop into the dialogue of the course gently and sporadically like windfall apples in the Tresillian orchards.


Unlike Tresillian, with its 110 varieties of apple trees, most people do not have access to such bounty. But Pam has a solution for that as well: “Wild crab apples make a wonderful base for other hedgerow plants like sloes, haws, rosehips and elderberry.” She shares a tip: if not used for preserving, crab apples can simply be kept in a bowl in the house to scent your rooms. In true economic style, she adds: “Once they go rotten, you can toss them in your fire and they will scent the smoke beautifully as well.”

Liz talks of how she started preserving because years ago she didn’t have a freezer. This is not the case for most today, but economy has again come to the forefront, what with the combination of a recession and the rising cost of food. Throughout the course, both will take the peelings from one recipe and use them for a base for another. Nothing goes to waste.

The demography of the class is not the clichéd WI ladies but a variety of ages, genders and one dashing couple who are attending the course before heading off to a new farm in South Africa where they intend to set up their own preserve-making company.

The class breaks at lunch time to indulge in a sumptuous feast of produce from the garden prepared to perfection. Classmates have time to share preserving stories and personal plans. As well as the professional aspirations, there are a good number who just wish to re-engage with the production of their own food both for pleasure and economy.

Before the afternoon session commences, John Harris takes everyone on a guided tour of the walled garden and the orchards; an inspiring preamble to an afternoon of expert peeling, chopping, boiling, straining of raw ingredients into an array of chutneys, sauces, curds, cheeses, leathers and jams. At the end of the day, there are glittering jars of amber, deep purple, mosaic-like colourful bottled fruit and vegetables and a warm heady scent in the room.

The course is truly inspirational and provides you with the basic skills needed to go forth and experiment with the produce available to you whether for your own cupboard or to realise commercial aspirations. 

Katy Davidson was a guest of Tresillian House Preserve Workshop. The next course begins on Saturday July 10. For more information, call 01872 510506, www.tresillian-house.co.uk