

# Blackberry and vanilla jam

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

I have several forager-type people in my life. They delight in vanishing into the forest to unearth nature's hidden food bounty. They don't just happen upon things, either. They have a sixth sense and know exactly what tree to look under or what crevice to peer in to find a treasure.

I'm convinced that my friend Becky knows every mushroom in the forest and can pinpoint its exact location. As a baker, I admire that type of precision, particularly since mushroom foraging feels like having a blindfolded person shoot an apple off your head with an arrow at a carnival. I feel uneasy that things could go very poorly.

My friend Basil not only can forage anything, but she also looks the part. She carries handmade foraging baskets with specialized shears as she effortlessly glides through the forest. I imagine she looks like Stevie Nicks wandering through the misty tree line while "Edge of Seventeen" plays in the background.

I see a bush with some ripe-ish berries while walking along the river and I pick them. It's 50/50 whether the berry I pick is ripe or not, which is why I leave mushroom foraging to Becky. This is my kind of foraging. Bleeding fingers, tripping over vines, and dropping the ripest berries. My lack of ethereal foraging technique doesn't mean I don't enjoy it, just that it's less magical to watch from a distance.

Wild blackberries are out in force in late summer. It would be remiss not to make a blackberry treat when the berries are at their peak.

While late summer lasts, get out and for-



age (on public land, or with permission). Imagine your personal foraging theme song

is playing in the background, Stevie Nicks or someone else. Unfortunately, my foraging song is probably the theme from Looney Tunes. To each their own.

Brian Medford

**Blackberries are ripe throughout August and September in the Columbia-Pacific region.**

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### Blackberry and vanilla jam

I have a thing for jam. It's perfect on toast, but also comes in handy over ice cream, spooned over a pound cake or when making thumbprint cookies. I prefer a looser-set jam. If you'd like your jam more set, cook it a bit more. The jam will continue to thicken as it cools.

#### Ingredients

- Wild blackberries, to taste
- 2/3 cup granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- One vanilla bean, split with seeds scraped (or 1 tablespoon vanilla bean paste)

#### Preparation

Place the berries, sugar, lemon juice and vanilla in a large nonstick pan over high heat. Bring to a boil and cook for 6 to 8 minutes until thickened. Allow the jam to cool completely. Keep in the refrigerator in a lidded jar for up to two weeks.

*Brian Medford is a baker, teacher and the owner of The Rusty Cup in Astoria. He has lived in the Northwest for more than 20 years and delights in Southern cooking. Contact him at [blmedford@gmail.com](mailto:blmedford@gmail.com).*