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Sweet Year.

A sweet start to the New Year

Cook hopes her conserves become holiday staple

By Penny Schwartz
Special to the Advocate

Move over, honey. Make room for a jar of Robin Cohen's apple-fig-almond honey conserve.

Throughout the High Holidays, festival tables are set with special round challot and slices of apple, both dipped in honey at the beginning of the meal, with blessings for a sweet New Year. For a new flavorful twist on the tradition, Cohen is cooking up batches of local seasonal fruit conserves and jams based on her own recipes and selling them at farmers' markets.

Last year the Arlington cook won Michael Ruhlman's national holiday cookie challenge for her rugellah recipe. An avid gardener, Cohen is a big backer of cooking with local, fresh foods and shopping at farmers' markets. She is also a prolific food writer, including her own blog and the column "Bounty of the Season," which runs in *The Arlington Advocate*.

In July, Cohen launched Doves & Figs Kitchen, a home-based business devoted to making and selling fruit preserves using only local fresh fruit. Throughout the summer, she has been preparing dozens of jars of preserves.

Popular sellers at farmers' markets have been Razzle Dazzle raspberry jam with Taza Mexican chocolate; Chase the Blues Away blueberry, cranberry, pecan conserve; and the more savory Peachy Mean spicy peach jam with cracked red pepper. Cohen's kitchen meets local health codes, but has not been kosher certified.

Just in time for Rosh Hashanah, Cohen is offering her newest variety, jars of apple-fig-almond-honey conserve, affixed with the label "L'Shana Tova." It is a fusion of aromatic flavors, with small chunks of cooked apples, dried figs and almonds. Cohen says that local apples suitable for the conserve include Northern Spy and Cortlands. Her first batches use Gravensteins, an old variety that stay very white through the cooking. After sampling several honey varieties, she settled on buckwheat, from a farm in Palmer, because of its strong flavor.

The conserve, bursting with a richness not ordinarily associated with apples, is perfect for dipping or spreading. Cohen first used the L'Shana Tova label when she gave jars of grape jam as High Holiday gifts to friends and to her rabbi and cantor at Temple Shir Tikvah in Winchester. She said her jam was on the table for Shir Tikvah's break fast at the end of Yom Kippur. For several years, she has created a conserve by combining apples, walnuts and cranberries. This is the first year she's stirring in local honey, in honor of Rosh Hashanah.

Making jams, conserves and preserves is a family tradition. As a child, Cohen spent summers in Montauk, Long Island. She, her brother and dad would pick beach plums and grapes to make jars and jars of jam. They used the old-fashioned method of boiling the fruit for a long time to enhance the natural sweetness, while using only a little sugar and no pectin. Cohen recalls many large family gatherings for Jewish holidays where her dad's jams were served in various forms at all meals. House guests always left with jars of jam as gifts.



Robin Cohen of Arlington and her new apple-fig-almond honey conserve, above.

Know your jar-gon

Can't tell a conserve from a preserve? Here's a quick primer:

Jam, the most familiar of the fruit preserves, is smooth fruit paste.

Preserve contains pieces of fruit.

Conserve has bigger chunks of fruit and typically is mixed with dried fruit or nuts.

On her blog post announcing the launch of Doves & Figs, Cohen wrote that while some kids wanted to have lemonade stands, it was always her dream to have a business selling summer jams.

But she ended up going into computers not conserves, founding a programming company. Twenty years later, she still runs that business – even as she stirs her pots of boiling plums and grapes.

This summer, Cohen has been selling her sweet wares under a Doves & Figs banner at farmers' markets in Arlington, Medford and Winchester. Doves & Figs also offers private label orders for fundraisers or for gift giving.

Visit www.dovesandfigskitchen.com, or email Robin@dovesandfigs.com.



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