



"Forbidden fruits create many jams."

~from Syman says



**WILDWOOD by-the-sea:
Nostalgia & Recipes
The Beach Plum ~ The Prunus Maritima**

"The Beach Plum" is an excerpt from the forthcoming book "Wildwood-By-The-Sea: Nostalgia and Recipes" by Anita Hirsch

Do you remember when you could walk by a shore home in the spring and find a tree in the yard filled with lightly fragrant small white flowers with a yellow center? The flowers become small green berries and later in the summer, in August and early September, the berries ripen into a blue to dark red fruit, almost the size of a plump blueberry but contain a pit and taste like a small plum? That is the Beach Plum.

These bushes which only grow along the Atlantic Coast from Maine to North Carolina are becoming rare. They were found by the Lenni Lenape, along the dunes and because of the ocean winds, they grew low along the sand and helped to protect the beaches. Violent coastal storms wiped out many of the beach plums and then other types of non-indigenous species were planted instead. There are not many around Cape May County but you will find them along Higbee Beach in West Cape May.

Quite a few large Beach Plum bushes can be found at the home of Nancy McPhearson along Seashore Road in West Cape May. The large bushes which line her driveway, are well known in the area. Diane Rea of the Rea Farm Market has about 350 beach plum trees planted on her farm property. From her harvest, she prepares Beach Plum Jelly that she sells in her farm stand. Diane says, "the problem with the beach plum is that they don't drop their fruit, and each small beach plum has to be picked individually from a cluster. The bushes also have stickers." In order to prepare a jam, the beach plum has to be pitted, so that is why Diane prefers making jelly. "Year to year, the bushes have different yields and the fruits when ripe are different colors, sweetness and sizes...some are blueberry size and some sour cherry size." You can eat the fruit off the tree as a snack. Or freeze the pitted fruit to use on your breakfast cereal.

The species of plum is called the *Prunus maritima* and is a deciduous plant, dropping its leaves in the fall and becoming a mass of showy red stems. The seeds used to propagate the Beach Plum, come from the New Jersey coast including West Cape May and Higbee Beach, as well as from Is-

land Beach State Park in Ocean County which is an excellent example of what our barrier islands used to look like. The vital and hardy beach plums can be visited on September 13th at the Island Beach State Park Beach Plum Festival .

There is a local group, formed five years ago, that is trying to preserve the beach plum: the Cape May County Beach Plum Association. (www.cmcbeachplum.com) An active group, I found them recently with a table display at the 4 H Fair in Cape May Courthouse.

It seems that due to the scarcity of beach plum trees, in 1996, Cornell University has taken an interest in their preservation, calling it a viable new food. It rivals the cranberry and the blueberry as a source of antioxidants. So not only are they healthy for you to eat, but they also help protect the dunes. Rutgers University's interest resurfaced in the fruit in 2007, as they started looking into the beneficial properties of the fruit, in particular its antibacterial properties just like the cranberries.

Volunteers from all over South Jersey including school groups, scouts and teens have planted about 2500 seeds or saplings in the county in the last 3 years. Dave Van Vorst, who is the president of the group, has planted 1000 trees on his property near Petersburg, between Route 9 and the Garden State Parkway which he calls his Plantation Farm; the rest of the association calls it "the Home of the Pampered Plum"! He is carefully monitoring the trees so he knows when the flowers form, the fruit begins to ripen, the color of the varieties and the sweetness. He hopes to then plant the varieties best for this area and the best tasting. Not only is he the President of the Cape May County group, but he is also the Vice President of the Cape May County Board of Agriculture.

According to Dave, "the reason that the Beach Plum grows along the coast is that they grow best by exposure to salt air and also they like the prehistoric soil prevalent along the shoreline."

The Vice President of the group is Karl Yungmans, from Petersburg, who owns Littleworth Christmas Tree

Farm and he has set aside some land to raise the Beach Plum. The Secretary of the group, since its inception, is Alma George, a fifth generation grower, who has about 900 beach plums planted orchard style and another 400 in pots. Alma then harvests the fruit to make jams which she and her husband John label Jalma Farms Jammin Beach Plum. (For more information, call 609-412-3123 or email jalmafarms@comcast.net.) The ingredients of her jams are sugar, beach plum and pectin, although she does have a jalapeno/habanera beach plum jam as well.

Places where you might find a beach plum sapling to plant in your yard or beach plum products are: Cape May Winery and Vineyard, Rea's Farm Market, Natali Vineyards (the first to make Beach Plum wine in Cape May County), Allen Family Farm in Belleplain, and Stiles Farm and Nursery. Dr. Warren Stiles was a horticulture professor and is an excellent source of information for the Cape May County Beach Plum Association.

The local group meets the first Wednesday of every month at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension in Cape May Courthouse. A light potluck dinner follows the 5 o'clock meetings.

BEACH PLUM JAM

- 3-4 cups beach plums (any variety)
- 6 cups sugar
- 1 package dry pectin or Certo

1. Wash jars and screw bands in hot soapy water. Rinse and drain. Add lids to a pan and pour boiling water over them. Let stand.
2. Lightly chop pitted beach plums with skins in food processor.
3. Put chopped plums and 1/2 cup water in a large pot. Bring to a rolling boil and boil for 5 minutes. Add pectin. Stir. Bring to a boil. Add sugar. Stir to mix. Bring to a boil. and boil one minute. (Follow package directions.)
4. Remove from heat and spoon into jars.
5. Seal and boil in water bath for 10 minutes or refrigerate.

Yield: 6 (8 oz.) jars

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Karl Yungmans, Alma George and Dave Van Vorst, officers of the Cape May County Beach Plum Association.



Beach Plums on Seashore Drive at the home of Nancy McPhearson



Beach Plums in the dunes



Beach Plum Jelly from Rea Farm



A jar of Beach Plum Jam from Jalma Farms



Beach Plum Branch

All photos (with exception of beach plums in dunes) by Michael Hirsch