The species of plum is called the Prunus maritima and is a deciduous shrub about 5 feet high, which grows only on the barrier beaches. The beach plum develops small green berries and later the color of the varieties and the fruit begins to ripen, the color of the varieties and the sweetness. The vital and hardy beach plums can be visited on September 13th at the Island State Park Beach Plum Festival.

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 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 Vice President of the group is Karl Yungkin, from Petersberg, who owns Littleroth 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 on her farm including West Cape May and is a deciduous shrub about 5 feet high. She also has 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.

Yield: 6 (8 oz.) jars

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.
4. Add pectin. Stir. Bring to a boil. Add sugar. Stir to mix. Bring to a boil and boil one minute. (Follow package directions.)
5. Remove from heat and spoon into jars.
6. Seal and boil in water bath for 10 minutes or refrigerate.

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