

The Shrub Rebirth

By Susie Iventosch



Photos provided

Devereaux Smith is the owner of Company Jam, which is a beautiful line of jams currently sold at Diablo Foods in Lafayette. Her "jam" career began while she was on a break after working for four years as the director of development and communication at The Bentley School in Lafayette.

"Oh my gosh, it was so much fun," Smith said. "It really spoke to me." Soon thereafter, her son, Asa Kamer, graduated from college, moved back home and started hanging out with his mom. Together they took her homemade jams to sell at the Kensington and Montclair farmers' markets.

They produce citrus jams, such as orange marmalade, in the winter and all sorts of fruit jams during the summer months. They were a big hit with customers.

But I am not here to talk about jam in this column!

One day at the Montclair farmers' market, a man came up to Smith and told her he used this particular type of apple to make shrubs.

What in the world is a shrub? Well, I mean, other than the type that resembles a bush in the front yard?

Smith was intrigued and began researching. She discovered that shrubs are drinking vinegars made with fruit, vinegar and sugar. Though they date back to 15th century England, shrubs were popular during America's colonial period, when fruits were mixed with sugar and vinegar as a method of preservation. The mixture was left to infuse overnight or for several days before straining off the fruit. Sometimes alcohol was added to further extend the shelf life of the fruit.

"I read that people used to drink vinegar for its medicinal effects, but I have no scientific evidence whatsoever about the health benefits," Smith noted. "But people just seem to love shrubs and I love to look at them. The colors are so beautiful!"

As it turns out, this vinegar-based beverage with its simultaneous sweet-tart flavor is making a comeback in many restaurants and bars. The shrub is used as a bar mixer, or simply added to seltzer for a refreshing non-alcoholic drink. It can also be used as a base for salad dressing.

"I like to pair different vinegars with each type of fruit," Smith pointed out. "For example, I like to use bal-

samic vinegar for my strawberry shrub, but there are no hard and fast rules in the world of shrubs!"

For alcoholic drink combinations, Smith likes to use lemon shrub with bourbon or Scotch, apple shrub with rum and blood orange shrub with vodka or gin. I used the apple shrub I made this week with whiskey, since my grown sons seem to be enjoying whiskey these days!

So far, Company Jam shrubs are not sold in the Lamorinda area, but Smith was kind enough to give us the general recipe for making shrubs at home. Hopefully, her shrubs will be

served soon in local bars and restaurants. In the meantime, you can have some fun making them yourself at home! The recipe below makes 1-2 cups, so you will probably want to at least double it or triple it if you want enough to serve for a party.

Note about the little pink bites from the last column: A reader wrote in to say she used the melon baller not only to scoop the ice cream for the dessert, but she also removed the stem and scooped out the strawberry with the same melon baller. This may save some time!

Company Jam Shrub Recipe

(Makes 1-2 cups)

16 ounces fresh fruit, grated or sliced on the mandoline

16 ounces vinegar

8-16 ounces sugar (I used granulated, but may try brown sugar next time, just to see how it goes)

Shred, slice or dice fruit, depending upon the fruit. For example, shred apples, but slice citrus fruits to about 1/8 inch thickness. With berries, I would suggest smashing slightly before adding to vinegar, but with strawberries, remove the stem and quarter before adding to other ingredients.

Mix fruit with sugar and vinegar and place in a container with a tight-fitting lid. Store in a dark, cool spot, like a pantry, for 4-5 days. When the mixture smells of intense fruit and the vinegar has mellowed, it is ready.

Strain fruit. Pour into jars, cover and refrigerate for later use.

Note: I used Granny Smith apples, cider vinegar and granulated sugar. We mixed it with one part shrub to one part whiskey to one part seltzer on the rocks. It was absolutely delicious!

Susie Iventosch is the author of Tax Bites and Tasty Morsels, which can be found at Across the Way in Moraga, www.amazon.com, and www.taxbites.net. Susie can be reached at suziventosch@gmail.com. **This recipe can be found on our website:** www.lamorindaweekly.com. If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977.



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