

Middle Eastern Fig Jam

There are lots of recipes for fig jam in cookbooks and online, but this one has a regional flair. The recipe, from Bass Samaan, the owner of Trees of Joy, a fruit tree nursery in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, features an unusual ingredient: mastic. It's a resinous gum from a Middle Eastern tree with a subtle piney flavor that complements the sweetness of the figs. Mastic, found in ethnic grocery stores, typically comes as small "pebbles" that are ground to a powder using a mortar and pestle (or two big spoons). This recipe makes about eight half-pint jars of jam.



INGREDIENTS

- 4 lbs. fresh ripe figs
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup sesame seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon mastic, ground
(or the same amount of ground anise)
- Juice of 1 lemon

PREPARATION

1. Wash figs, remove stems and cut in half.
2. Place figs in a deep pot, add sugar, and stir well.
3. Bring to a boil for 15 minutes over medium heat. Do not add water, the figs and sugar will liquefy on their own.
4. Turn heat to low and let simmer for one hour. Add the sesame seeds.
5. Continue simmering and as mixture thickens, add the ground mastic and lemon juice.
6. Pour the jam into jars. You can refrigerate them for a few months or keep the jam longer by sealing and canning the jars in a traditional hot water bath.