THE MAGICAL QUINCE

The texture is chalky and dry. It's tough to slice, and there's no point in tasting it raw since it must be cooked to be enjoyed. But what makes the quince alluring enough to overcome such drawbacks is its perfume, which lingers with the fruit after cooking. I once pinpointed its notes as a combination of narcissus and oak leaves when the two scents collided in a garden. Searching for the base of the flower stem, my hand disturbed both the oak leaves and the blossom. A cloud of scent rose, and there it was, the haunting spring-fall bouquet of quince. This perfume is not an exaggeration on my part. Victorians made good use of quinces to freshen their linen drawers and closets. Put one in your car and you won't mind traffic quite as much. A few on a dresser table will fill your room as if with a bouquet of flowers.

But quinces are for eating too. An old-fashioned fruit, once valued for its pectin as well as its hardiness in the garden, it reveals hints of both apples and pears in its shape and the patterns of the seeds. It is a rustic version, though, for its shape is often ungainly and its skin is sometimes coated with a soft down. When ripe, in the fall, the fruit will be hard, aromatic, and golden. Pale fruits lacking in scent have simply been picked too soon. For a quince to win the praise it deserves, you'll want to look at the farmers' market or over someone's backyard fence and choose those that are fully ripe. Wrapped in newspaper and stored in a cool place, a ripe quince will keep for months, provided it hasn't inadvertently been bruised in picking or handling. Though hard-skinned, they do bruise more easily than you might expect.

Quinces go beautifully into dishes that contain pears and apples, but they take longer to cook than either, so if you wish to add some to a dish it's a good idea to cut them more finely than the other fruits. Grated quinces can be added directly to quick breads and pancakes. Generally, I find that poached quinces are the most useful form to have. Each fall I poach as many as I can in syrup until they turn deep pink, then keep them refrigerated in their syrup and use them over the next few months, adding them to compotes of poached pears, tartes tatins, apple galettes, pies, crisps, and so forth. Anything that's made with apples or pears is even better when quince is mixed in.

Deborah Madison: Local Flavors (315)

Quince Preserves

An ancient Roman symbol of love, the yellow-skinned quince looks and tastes like a cross between an apple and a pear. This fragrant fruit is better cooked than raw and is the perfect choice for preserves.

TIP
When preparing quince, discard all gritty parts.

Makes about four 8-ounce (250 mL) jars

3 cups	granulated sugar	750 mL
8 cups	water	2 L
7 cups	quartered cored peeled quince	1.75 L

1. Prepare canner, jars and lids. *(For more information, see page 415.)*
2. In a large stainless steel saucepan, combine sugar and water. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Boil hard, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes. Stir in quince. Reduce heat and boil gently, stirring frequently, until fruit is transparent and syrup thickens. Remove from heat and test gel (see page 21). If gel stage has been reached, skim off foam.
3. Ladle hot preserves into hot jars and process as in Steps 3 and 4 of Ginger Pear Preserves, above.

Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving