

*"The quinces, never to be outgrown  
in affection, would hang like yellow  
lanterns on the tree after the leaves had  
fallen, the most lasting of the orchard's  
beauty and none more appetising  
stewed or baked or in pies with clotted  
cream or preserved in jellies and jams."*

Miles Franklin, *Childhood at Brindabella*



Quince, watercolour, Stephanie Goss

## quince forbidden fruit, persian delight

Margaret Johnson

### MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF A QUINCE WAS ONE OF FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

Riding to school as a young child, I rode past a tree heavily laden with golden fruit that for all the world looked like apples, though just a touch more furry. They looked marvellous; full and bulbous and with a heady perfume. One bite soon put paid to those romantic thoughts. Instead of heaven, my mouth was filled with this horrid puckering sensation and a tannic reaction from this hard and very unfriendly fruit. Obviously I was doing something wrong and a suitable result you may say!

With passing years and a little more knowledge, my love affair with quinces began and now I really do love them.

A member of the 'pomme' family, as are apples and pears, they look rather like a softly convoluted apple, are yellow skinned when ripe and are covered with a soft grey down. They also possess the most permeating perfume and with a few adjustments can be substituted for either apples or pears in many recipes.

They are an autumn fruit, arriving at a time of year when the cooler nights call for more complex dishes and perhaps when cooks are ready to return to the now cooler kitchen.

They originated in Persia and feature in many Middle Eastern and southern European dishes. Their acid and astringency levels provide a perfect balance to the richness of meats such as lamb and goat.

Quince is meant to be cooked, though I have read that some varieties in the Middle East are enjoyed raw but in a much ripened state. When cooked slowly and gently for a long period of time their colour changes from their initial pretty yellow to the most glorious shade of deep ruby red. Apart from the gorgeous flavour and perfume, this rich colour provides the base for some spectacular dishes.

Simply poached quinces are delicious served with a just a blob of thick cream. They also bake beautifully and work well for the home preserver.

Pickled they are a stunning partner to rich terrines such as duck or rabbit.

Quinces are very high in pectin, making them ideal for jams and other preserves. Europeans have made a quince paste for centuries and served with a ripe piece of brie and some crusty bread this is about as perfect a food match as there is. Make your own or buy some from a good delicatessen. It is sold under the name of 'marmalada'.

### QUINCE TURKISH DELIGHT

4 cups sugar  
4 cups water  
1 tsp lemon juice  
1 cup cornflour  
1 tsp cream of tartar  
200 g quince paste,  
cut into small cubes  
1 cup icing sugar  
half cup cornflour

Place the sugar in a heavy based pot with one and a half cups of the water and the lemon juice. Bring to the boil. In a separate bowl, gradually mix the cornflour with the rest of the water and cream of tartar. When the syrup has boiled, gradually add the cornflour mixture, stirring all the time. Lower the heat to just the occasional bubble and cook for two hours, stirring frequently to prevent any sticking. The mixture will get very thick and gradually become transparent with a pale golden hue. Remove from the heat and mix through the quince paste until it dissolves. Pour into a slice tray that you have lined with baking paper. When the mixture is cold, turn it out of the tin and cut into 3cm cubes. Combine the icing sugar and the cornflour. Roll the squares in this and stack them in a storage container. Dust each layer generously with the mixture.

