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Home & Garden

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The Mercury News

I. Josie Lepe -- Mercury News

TASTE OF SUMMER: There's nothing quite like the taste of a plum or apricot at the peak of ripeness. But what if you could put a little bit of that away for, say, a rainy day in December?

People who make homemade preserves -- or know someone who does -- can have that taste of summer year-round. But now you can get your hands on an eclectic variety of artisan preserves, marmalades, jellies and syrups without heating up the stove or begging a friend who cans.

Common Ground in Palo Alto, a non-profit that offers plants, classes and cool stuff, is stocking products made by Village Harvest. The selection will vary with the seasons because Village Harvest volunteers use homegrown, tree-ripened, pesticide-free fruit from Santa Clara Valley gardens. Each jar has a label that tells you exactly where the fruit was harvested.

To tempt your taste buds, here's a list of just some of the varieties: Eureka lemon marmalade, loquat butter, pineapple guava preserves, Santa Rosa plum jam, kumquat syrup, poha berry preserves, quince marmalade. Prices are \$3-\$7, depending on size. Some varieties have limited availability.

To celebrate the launch of the line, Common Ground will host a tasting from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday. The event also will feature Santa Clara County master gardeners, who will be available to answer questions about growing and harvesting

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fruit trees.

There is no charge to attend (although you may find yourself loading up on preserves). Common Ground is at 559 College Ave., Palo Alto. Details: (650) 493-6072.

THE KITCHEN GARDEN: Even if the only space you have is a small patio or balcony, you can grow fresh goodies in containers to jazz up what's for dinner.

Here are some combinations to try in a half-barrel or large, 24-inch-diameter pot (with some suggestions courtesy of the National Garden Bureau):

- For soups: lemon grass, thyme, scallions, parsley and chives.
- For Italian dishes: yellow pear tomato, garlic, basil and parsley.
- A French twist: tarragon, chives, parsley and chervil. Set the perennials (the tarragon and the chives) toward the rear of the container so you don't disturb their roots when you pull up the annuals (parsley and chervil) at the end of their season.
- Pizza lovers: any cherry tomato, sweet green pepper, scallions and oregano.
- Stir-fry: hot peppers, snow peas, bok choy and Chinese (narrow) eggplant.
- Salsa: Sungold tomato, jalapeño (or hotter) pepper and cilantro.
- For the kids: Sungold tomato (in center), radishes, bush beans, basil and carrots. Mix seeds of radishes and carrots together and sow around the outer edge. The radishes will be pulled before the carrots need more space to grow.

TOP JOBS:

- Sometimes tomato plants just can't be contained, no matter how you've caged or staked them. Unruly vines can thrive

just fine, but you'll want to keep any fruit off the ground, where it's vulnerable to decay and pests. Try this: Drive a small stake next to the ripening fruit. Cut a piece from the leg of an old pair of pantyhose to use as a ``sling'' to suspend the fruit.

- Dig and divide Oriental poppies and bearded iris.

-- *Holly Hayes*



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