ORANGE, LEMON AND LIME MARMALADE

I must admit to being a marmalade lover, and I enjoy it any time of the day or night, particularly if it is home-made.

This is a very successful marmalade because it is not too bitter, as it uses ordinary oranges, lemons and limes. Choose limes that have a soft skin, not a hard and dry one. The invention of the food processor has been a godsend for marmalade-makers like me -- I remember my mother painstakingly slicing up the tough peel for hours. Simply buzz small amounts of the peel with a little of the measured water, until coarsely chopped. Unless otherwise stated on the pack, all citrus fruits are sprayed with wax to prevent them drying out. Organic fruit is usually unwaxed, or, otherwise, scrub the fruit well in warm water to rub off the wax.

Makes about 4 x 450g (1lb) jars.

You will need:

2 large, sweet oranges
2 limes
1 large lemon
1.75 litres (3pts) water
15g (½oz) fresh root ginger, peeled and finely chopped
1.35kg (2½lb) sugar, warmed for a few minutes on a flat tin in a moderate oven
75g (3oz) preserved stem ginger, finely chopped, optional

Prepare four or five jam jars by washing and scalding them. Ensure they are piping hot before putting in the marmalade, and have a packet of jam-pot covers ready nearby. Use a wide, heavy-based saucepan. Scrub the oranges, lemons and limes if necessary, then cut in half and squeeze out the juice. If there are lots of pips, you can use them to set the marmalade. Tie them in a square of muslin or white cotton, attach the bag to the pot's handle and hang the bag into the pot when cooking the fruit. Cut each half of squeezed-out skin into three or four pieces. Put two or three handfuls at a time into the food processor with a little of the water and buzz until chopped finely, but don't let the skins turn to mush. Transfer to the saucepan. Add the fruit juice, the remaining water and the finely chopped root ginger and bring gently to the boil. Simmer at a moderately brisk pace, stirring occasionally, until the peel is soft enough to squash flat between your finger and thumb. Then, add in the warm sugar and the preserved stem ginger, if using, and cook over a moderate heat until the sugar is completely dissolved. Bring to the boil and boil at a brisk, steady pace until the setting point is reached.

To test for the setting point

Chill three or four saucers or small plates in the fridge before you start boiling your marmalade.

When you think you have reached the setting point, put a spoonful of the marmalade onto the cold saucer, having drawn the saucepan off the heat to avoid overcooking, just in case you have reached the setting point already. After a minute or so, using a spoon, push the
little pool of the marmalade gently to one side. If the setting point has been reached, the very top surface will wrinkle. If it does not, return the pot to the heat, continue cooking, then, after a short interval, test again in the same way.

To put into the jam pots

Spoon off any scum that may have formed on the top of the marmalade. I find it handy to use a Pyrex measuring jug to scoop up the hot marmalade and pour into the jars. Have a plate ready on which to stand the jug between uses.

Once the marmalade has been poured into the jars, cover the top of the marmalade with the little wax disc from the packet of jam-pot covers, and place directly down onto the marmalade to partly seal it. Then, wet one side of the cellophane covers, placing the dry side down onto the jam pot. Pull, stretch and fix the cellophane in place with one of the supplied plastic bands. As it dries and cools, the cellophane will tighten to form a secure lid. Stick on name labels with the date. Store in a cool, airy place out of direct sunlight.

A tip for next year, during the brief season -- from December to February -- for Seville oranges. When you find them in the shops, looking lumpy and unwaxed, buy a few kilos, even if you have no time to make the marmalade -- just pop them in your freezer until you are ready to do so.