

Little jars of delicious

NINE years ago Avra Panousopoulou took a leap of faith by turning a hobby into a business, calling it Yiam Homemade Delights. For years the extra production from her family farm had been hauled into the kitchen and made into a myriad of pastes, preserves and pickles. But then gifts for family and friends became orders for more of the delicious treats homemade by the mother of three. Today the successful entrepreneur ships her products to clients as far off as Sweden.

“This work that I do is not to make money,” Panousopoulou says. “When you look at profits it becomes necessary to make cuts to the quality of your product. It’s just not in my character to make those cuts.”

The self-proclaimed “one woman show” has set up her life around the business. The product sourcing, production, recipe creation and administration of Yiam products take place from Panousopoulou’s production facility and home in the village of Agia, in Larisa.

Farm girl

Panousopoulou did not start off as a gourmet food manufacturer. Brought up in Athens with a famous director father, the then 25-year-old Panousopoulou packed up her family, leaving Athens to try her hand at a farmer’s life. After several years of growing all types of fruit and vegetables, the idea for Yiam sprouted.

The Yiam range includes 160 different gourmet products, with quantities of each deliberately kept to a minimum



of approximately 1,000 jars or packets. Panousopoulou refuses to use commercial-size pots because she is reluctant to lose the homemade quality of the foods.

“Last year I didn’t make the plum marmalade because the fruit itself was not very good. Even though I had requests for it I didn’t want to make a marmalade that would be of inferior taste,” she says.

Panousopoulou does not limit her creativity to the typical marmalades and pickles that we find on the supermarket shelf. Marmalade of frangostafilo (gooseberry) is a traditional sweet rarely found today which she recommends with roasted quail.

Excitedly describing her discovery, Panousopoulou says: “Today at the markets I found beautiful grapes from Corinth that I will flavour with aberoriza [white geranium leaves]. Last year when I first tried the combination it sold out within a month.”

Secret to success

Trips to the market for fresh produce are part of her daily routine, although Panousopoulou supplements her cor-



nucopia with homegrown walnuts and various wild greens that are collected from the surrounding mountains.

The tsitsiravla toursi, fresh sprouts of the wild pistachio tree, are pickled with carrot and mustard seeds and can be added to enhance a simple salad or accompany a hearty bean dish.

One of the best endorsements for a product is to be listed on the menu of top chefs. Five-star hotels in Athens have added Yiam marmalade to their breakfast buffets and Christoforos Peskias, one of Greece’s best-known chefs, sells them in his deli-style restaurant, P-Box, in Kifisia.

One of the most popular dishes on the Peskias’ menu is the ladotyri saganaki with Yiam lemon marmalade. Served in the cast-iron pan straight from the stove to the table, the sweet citrus contrasts beautifully with the cheese. The cappuccino at P-Box is served with Yiam’s exquisite kourambiedes made with ageioproveio (goat and sheep’s milk) butter.

When asked to describe her favourite product, Panousopoulou is somewhat lost for words.

“There is no favourite. It all comes from what’s in season,” she finally says. “When the strawberries arrive I’m excited by the bounty of the strawberry. The season ends but the next fruit becomes available and that brings me joy.”

Recipes by Avra Panousopoulou

Pie high

Makes 4 servings (but can be consumed all by one person)

Ingredients

- 500g dough for bread
- 1 jar of Yiam Mediterranean Salad
- 2 small tomatoes
- 1 tbsp of Yiam Sun-dried Tomato Paste

Method

Preheat oven to 200C. On an oiled baking pan, spread the dough and press with your fingers, so as to make the edges rise. Spread the tomato paste and the Mediterranean Salad, without the juice, on the surface. All the vegetables in the jar are coarsely chopped, so you will have a very tasty pie or pizza, which only needs thin slices of fresh tomato to be ready for baking. If you wish, you can cover dry parts of the dough with oil from the jar. Before baking, pierce with fork in several places to prevent pie from rising. It needs a very hot oven and must be placed on the lowest rack and baked for 20 minutes.

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