

THE THIRTEENTH BATCH, 2015.

BY VARIOUS NEW FOOD TASTERS

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**Mulberry Jam with a Twist**  
*Submitted by Mara Altman*

You want to make fresh mulberry jam. You look up recipes online. Pectin, what is that? No thanks. Sounds like a naughty sex position for hummingbirds. You decide to go for a simple and straightforward concoction: mulberries, lemon and sugar.

You pick mulberries every other day for a week to ensure that you will have a large enough batch of jam to share with your whole family. You can't wait to share the bounty of your garden with your family.

While you pick, you pop big juicy berries into your mouth. One for jam, one for you. You chuckle to yourself: *Canning taxes*.

If only everyone understood how hilarious you are.

Once you have collected enough, you quickly rinse the berries and then dump them into a large saucepan. Over medium heat, you begin to crush them by tamping down with a fork. You are very excited by tamping and do it quite enthusiastically. You ruin your shirt—it looks like blood spatter—but you don't care because this is a worthy cause. You are basically an Earth pilgrim whose duty is to take Mother Nature to the next level via a mason jar.

As the berries heat, more and more juices are released and as they do, you begin to notice tiny white particles. You are concerned, but shrug it off. You suspect the juice is beginning to boil. Bubbles are often white. They are probably tiny white bubbles. Occam's razor: No more assumptions should be made than are necessary.

You continue to stir.

After some time, you look more closely. The tiny white bubbles have not yet disappeared. You notice that in addition to not disappearing, they are in fact moving. Some might even call the motion 'slithering.'

"Babe, come here!" you shout to your husband. "I think the jam is alive."

He refuses to come and look. Instead, he brings up some moments from the past that he's still sore about like that one time you made him smell your fingers after taking out the garbage and that other time you told him to try a bite of burrito and then when he did, you said, "Disgusting, right?"

He thinks you are deliberately trying to quash his peace and joy. It's not true; you just happened to interpret the 'in sickness' part of 'in sickness and in health' in a slightly different way.

In other words, you are on your own.

You want to—you need to—save your jam! It's a gift for your family!

You look up *worms* and *mulberries* on the Internet. No one on the Internet seems to be surprised that hundreds of invertebrates are streaming out of your preserves. In fact, the Internet tells you, Earth Pilgrim, that you are a fool. Everyone knows that before eating the berries, you're supposed to soak them in warm water. That's how you get the worms out. Duh!

You might be a lot of things, but you're no quitter. You're too far into the process to give up. Once the nausea subsides—it began when you thought back to all those canning taxes you collected—you take the edge of a spoon and carefully lift one tiny creature out at a time.

You are now forty-five minutes in and there are still hundreds of worms inside the saucepan. You suspect you had an epiphany, but are afraid you are actually losing your mind? See, you suddenly realize that you do not believe in superfluous killing. You do not want these worms' lives to be lost in vain.

You point to the genocide inside of the pan. "You know, in some cultures they would consider this a delicacy," you tell your husband.

You, Earth Pilgrim, feel reborn. You are at peace. You turn up the flame, bringing the dark red mixture back up to a boil. You add four cups of sugar and the juice of one lemon. After simmering for an hour, you pour the mixture into four sterile mason jars. They are beautiful artisanal masterpieces. You snap a photo and post it to Instagram.



It is at this point that your husband reminds you that both of your brothers will not be able to eat this jam: One is a vegetarian and the other one is kosher. Your father, you soon learn, is fine with the worms, but hates mulberries.

You are now the lucky owner of four pints of worm jam.

You toast and butter an English muffin and then swab a little worm jam on top. You convince yourself that a gourmand in China would probably pay \$100 a gram for this stuff.

You take a bite. It tastes like a jolly rancher—wincingly sweet and sour all at the same time. You decide that it's not half bad, but you clearly need a second opinion. You find your husband, reach the muffin toward his mouth and say, "If you love me, you'll try a bite."

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**Camel Balls Bubble Gum (Extra Sour)**  
*Submitted by Mara Altman*

My friend's Central Park potluck picnic was upon me. I didn't want to bring the ordinary massaged kale or tub of hummus; I wanted to delight and fright people. So I went to a novelty shop and found the perfect item: a box of Camel Balls Bubble Gum. The packaging depicts a desert-scape with a dromedary—a one-hump camel—mischievously looking over its shoulder in the direction of its rather conspicuous scrotum. Just beneath the gonads reads the phrase, LIQUID FILLED. To the left is a drawing of the product: a brown oval with a red gooey center. It looked like a Toucan miscarriage and/or something that Marina Abramovic might use as confetti.

Buying the balls was clearly a life-of-the-party move. This was going to be legendary. The potluck goers, lauding me for bringing something edgy yet functional, would all say, "Holy crap, Mara, how'd you find something so edgy yet functional?" There would be high-fives, laughter, and a hook to enable radical and taboo discourse like vasectomy reversals, canine neutering, and whether or not polyethylene was causing boobs to grow in adolescent boys.

I arrived one-hour into the festivities and pulled the box of Camel Balls from my purse, pointed to it and shouted "Camel Balls!"

The box was not torn excitedly from my hands. I waited. Waited. Nothing. No one even mentioned jock itch. I was wondering when everyone decided to get so darn mature.

Right then, I felt a pinch in my lower abdomen. Was that the sensation of my ovaries growing crow's feet? Whoops, silly me, I think that was just a hunger pang.

Another two hours passed and the Camel Balls remained untouched. People were busy opening up the 23rd tub of red-pepper-flavored hummus. So I brought the box to the center of the blanket and unwrapped it myself. Inside, each gumball was individually packaged. I discussed the finer points to anyone within earshot: "These balls are safe to chew." "These balls never get blue." "These get you pregnant with happy."

Yes, I've already fully investigated it, rewinds can't happen in real life.

One hour later, I left with all of the Camel Balls rolling around loosely at the bottom of my purse.

On the subway ride home, I had a lot of balls and nothing to lose. So I tore into one. The gumball was the size of a robin's egg and had the glossy sheen of something 100% inedible. So I popped it in my mouth. When my teeth sunk in to it, the flavor leached out: sweet and sour bursts that made my brows crinkle and my eyes squint. The intense artificial sugary flavor was nostalgic. It tasted a bit like being invited to a game of spin the bottle, but only to watch. The flavor dissipated rapidly. *Ta-da*, all of a sudden it felt like I'd attempted to snack on Elmer's adhesive putty. I spit out the rubbery wad shortly thereafter. Overall, the gum was gross. So I put another one in my mouth. What else to do? This was clearly my karma: to wind up alone, sucking on camel balls.

