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Shortcuts: quince

Quince is terribly bitter raw, but delicious when added to pies, tarts, crumbles or made into syrup with wintery spices

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It's wonderfully old-fashioned, quince, and in need of revival. The flesh is too bitter to eat raw, but once cooked, it collapses into the heavenly scented soft, sweet, rose-coloured fruit that is more familiar. You can treat them much like apples and pears (they are similar in shape and colour, and in season at the same time, from October to December), baking or poaching them, or making pies, tarts and crumbles.

Try a quince and apple crumble, stewing the fruit for 15 minutes with butter and sugar first, before adding your crumble topping and baking for an hour. Or poach in sweet wine, which brings out the delicate fragrance.

Quince will take on the Christmassy spices of clove and cinnamon if you like them, though I prefer the simple flavour of the fruit on its own.

Make a syrup from 700ml muscat, 300ml water, 500g sugar, and a split vanilla pod and bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve. You could add a couple of tablespoons of either rosewater or orange blossom water, to give an extra, slightly exotic flavour.

Peel, core and quarter your quinces, dopping them straight into the syrup to prevent them discolouring. Poach at a simmer for 15 minutes, then switch off heat and allow to cool. When ready to serve, fish out the fruit, bring the syrup to a boil to reduce and pour over the fruit. Scatter with chopped pistachios and serve with Greek yoghurt, crème fraîche or mascarpone.

Because quince is high in pectin, it naturally lends itself to jellies and jams, the most famous of which — quince cheese (or membrillo, as the Spanish know it), is simple to make. It's an excellent accompaniment to hard cheeses, as well as lamb.



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Chop (no need to peel or core) and boil the quinces for half-an-hour until collapsed. Discard the water, pass the fruit through a sieve and return to a pan, adding three quarters of its weight in caster sugar.

Bring to a simmer to dissolve and cook gently for half an hour, stirring to prevent sticking and burning, until a spoon dragged through the bottom parts the fruit completely. Transfer to a lightly oiled shallow dish and allow to cool and set — it will keep for six months.