

Romania, preserves

Green walnut jam, *Juglans regia*, *dulceata de nuci verzi*

Walnuts have been part of the culture of Transylvanian Saxon villages for centuries. In addition to the existing cultivation, tradition maintains that Austro-Hungarian Empress Maria Theresa ordered the planting of walnut trees between properties, as they do not burn easily and act as fire-breaks in times of village fires.

Whatever the reason, a pattern can still be seen in most Saxon villages, consisting of a row of walnut trees marking the village boundary between the orchard/vegetable patch behind each house and the arable fields beyond. In addition to the line of walnut trees, many private courtyards and public spaces, such as village squares and churchyards, have productive walnut trees. The Romanians say that a walnut tree offers the best shade since the trees harbor few pests and insects.

There are over 10 distinct walnut varieties in Romania. Those with smaller nuts and with thicker skins are regarded as having better flavor and better storage properties, retaining their flavor longer.

Harvesting the nuts is carried out by hand. Tree owners will often employ poor people to pick, hull and shell walnuts, and pay them by weight. This is a good source of income for poorer villagers, particularly for women who shell the nuts.

The nuts are generally picked in autumn when the hull has begun to crack and fall off. They are hulled, washed and dried quickly in the sun to avoid moisture damage. They are left in their shells until they are used to avoid loss of flavor. A mature tree will produce about 10,000 nuts. The nuts are used for various purposes.

Green walnut jam, or Dulceata de nuci verzi, is found all over Romania, especially in Maramures to the north and Buzau to the east. To make it, the nuts are picked young in June, before much of the hull is formed. The nuts are shelled, a time-consuming process with young nuts, soaked in cold water for six hours, removed from the water and mixed with sugar or local honey and occasionally stirred for 24 hours. Lemon can also be added. This is then turned into jam in the usual way (low heat, long period of cooking).

The green walnuts have little flavor themselves. They add a distinctive, crunchy texture to the jam. It is a sweet jam, best eaten with a product such as Urda (whey cheese) which gives a contrast to the sweetness.

Production area

Southeastern Transylvania