

Food detective

Annabelle White samples the renaissance of fruit pastes.

OVER THE years I have experienced many a mutiny on the taste-test panel. Friends and friends of friends, family, chefs, good home cooks have all volunteered but very few last more than a few sessions – mainly because they didn't get to experience a taste-test like today's. The products we tested were all fabulous – each in their own way.

Fruit pastes are now a trendy part of any cheeseboard but what exactly are they and why are they now so popular? They date back to a style of preparing fruit popular in Elizabethan times. They are essentially very sweet confections that call for large amounts of sugar. Fruit pastes are made by boiling a pulp of various fruits until they reduce to a kind of thick jam, with the addition of almost double its

weight in sugar. Once it reaches the preferred consistency, it is then moulded into rings or knots, dried, and then either left plain, or sometimes crystallised or candied.

Today a little serving of fruit paste with a piece of creamy blue cheese (at room temperature of course) is superb and illustrates perfectly why they work so well on a cheeseboard. In essence it's all about contrast: the salty, earthy and full-flavoured cheese contrasting with the sweet, vibrant, fruity, zingy, soft texture of the paste. It's a combination fit for a queen.

Our selection today is less sweet and can also be used in glazes, marinades, stuffings, and salads. Add a little to your next jus or chicken gravy.



Rutherford and Meyer Pear Fruit Paste, 120g, \$6.69

★★★★

New Zealand-made. Pear paste (min 41%). Slightly less pear aroma here but that was the only disappointment. It looked good, although it was more processed in appearance. This was sticky, like a jelly lolly, but it had an extraordinary pear flavour. Very sweet, but a fruity sweetness. First taste on the palette is "lolly-like" but within a few seconds the taste opens up to a full fruit expression. All samplers agreed this was an extraordinary fruit flavour. Excellent price point. Per 100g: fat, 0g; sugars, 59.2g; sodium, 15mg; price per 100g, \$5.58. **Would buy again with full confidence.**



Maggie Beer Spiced Pear Paste, 100g, \$8.35

★★★½

Product of Australia. Pear (55%) Made by food icon Maggie Beer we were expecting great things and we were not disappointed. Good aroma of pear. Glossy, smooth, with good colour and attractive packaging. "Appealing all-round" said the panel. This could pass off as home made, with its intense multi-layered fruit flavour that was almost like treacle or "cooked". This had a depth of flavour that was complex with a hint of ginger/warmth. The samplers loved the texture and its musty/spicy taste. Per 100g: fat, less than 1g; sugars, 55g; sodium, less than 5mg; price per 100g, \$8.35. **Would buy again but it's pricey.**



Valley Produce Company Pear & Hazelnut Fruit Paste, 75g, \$7.75

★★★½

Product of Australia. Contains more than 75% fruit. This paste had a good aroma, with interesting packaging and was the most home-made looking. It had a dense texture, that would be lovely with cheese. Of the three this one had the true "gritty" pear texture, the flavour was strong and tart. The aftertaste was not overly sweet, but the hazelnut was not evident. Good pear flavour here, but very expensive. Per 100g: fat, 4g; sugars, 48.7g; sodium, 10mg; price per 100g, \$10.33. **Would buy again.**