

PROSECCO AND POMEGRANATE JELLY

1 x 75cl bottle Prosecco or other white wine
250ml water
300g caster sugar
8 leaves gelatine
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
3 teaspoons Cointreau, Grand Marnier or
Triple sec, plus more to serve
seeds from 1 pomegranate, or 75g
pomegranate seeds from a tub/packet
flavourless oil for greasing
double cream to serve (optional)

I love wine and liqueur jellies, and I think I've had a version – sauternes and lemon balm, gin and tonic, slut red raspberries in chardonnay jelly, blackberries and Muscat – in pretty well all of my books. They are delicate, luscious and incredibly easy to make, providing, that is, you use leaf gelatine: I have never been able to make the powdered stuff work for me.

There's no absolute need to use Prosecco: any good white wine would do. What's important is simply to make this: the pale glint of the jelly against the red jewels of pomegranate makes it as beautiful to look at as to eat.

✳ Lightly grease a 1-litre jelly mould with flavourless oil and sit it on a small tray so it's easy to convey it to the fridge later.

✳ Pour the Prosecco and water into a saucepan, add the sugar and stir to help it dissolve (but do not stir once the pan is on the heat). At the same time, put the gelatine leaves into a dish and cover with cold water, letting them soak for 5 minutes.

✳ Put the pan on the heat, bring to the boil and let it boil for a minute.

✳ Add the vanilla and keep the pan bubbling gently for another minute, before taking it off the heat.

✳ Carefully ladle about 250ml of the wine-sugar mixture into a measuring jug.

✳ When the gelatine leaves have had a good 5 minutes' soaking, lift them out, squeezing and squelching them to remove excess water (this is curiously pleasurable) and whisk them into the jug of hot wine-sugar mixture to dissolve.

✳ Pour the jugful of liquid back into the pan (which must be still off the heat), whisk again, and tip it all back into the jug, before pouring it into the prepared jelly mould. (This may sound a kerfuffle, but it ensures the gelatine is thoroughly dispersed.)

✳ Put the filled-to-the-brim mould, still on its tray, into the fridge and leave to set overnight. It has a gentle set, which is what makes it so delectable.

✳ Just before you are ready to serve, fill a sink or plastic washing up bowl with warm water to come about halfway up the mould, and sit the as-yet-unturned mould in the warm water for half a minute.

The amount of gelatine leaves is deliberately low; packets will instruct you to use more, but a voluptuously soft set is desirable. This does mean, however, that the jelly needs an overnight set in the fridge and cannot be un moulded in advance.

MAKE AHEAD TIP:

Make the jelly up to 3 days ahead. If it's possible to cover the mould with a tight seal of clingfilm without it touching the jelly, then do so. Otherwise, leave uncovered and put in the fridge, but make sure you have nothing heavily flavoured with garlic in the fridge at the same time!

✿ Take the mould out of the sink, wipe the water off the outside and place your serving plate on top. Then, with one hand on the plate and the other on the mould, tip them both over and lift off the mould to reveal the jelly. It will look smaller than it did in the mould; that's expected.

✿ Dribble the Cointreau (or your choice of alcohol) over the jelly (putting the bottle on the table so people can anoint with more as they eat) and scatter with pomegranate seeds, a few on top, but most around the side. It spoils the jewel-like clarity of the jelly, but this is out of this world with a little double cream poured over each portion. Put a small jugful on the table as encouragement.

