



ROSE PETAL JAM

F&T **WINE MATCH** Medium-bodied, red fruit-scented rosé champagne (eg NV Pol Roger)



ICE IN HEAVEN

F&T **WINE MATCH** Sweet, citrus-scented Australian muscat (eg 2009 Orange Muscat and Flora, Brown Brothers)

COLD CUCUMBER SOUP WITH PLUMP RAISINS, WALNUTS, MINT AND SPRING ONIONS

F&T **WINE MATCH** Bright, fresh Coteaux d'Aix en Provence rosé (eg 2010 Château de Vignelaure)

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FRESH POMEGRANATE JELLY WITH POMEGRANATE SEEDS

F&T **WINE MATCH** Complex, rich rosé sparkling (eg 2006 Schramsberg, California)



The delicate fragrance and distinctive flavour of rose permeates this eclectic collection of Persian recipes by Ariana Bundy, while our own Jessica Basi explores the heavenly inspired origins of cooking with this floral ingredient

PERSIAN SPICE MIX

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QUAILS STUFFED WITH ROSE PETALS

F&T **WINE MATCH** Smooth, fruity Beaujolais cru (eg 2009 Fleurie, La Madone)

Coming up **Roses**

The rose, little used in traditional English cuisine, is a flower shrouded in Eastern mysticism. When the prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven's seventh floor, he found angels supping on *sheer birinj* (a milky rice pudding infused with cardamom and rose water).

Upon discovering how to recreate this 'food of the angels', he – according to Persian legend – returned to Earth and shared

the secrets of rose water with man. Today Persian cooks follow the principle of combining 'hot and cold' foods. 'Rose water is considered a "hot" food, so we must balance it with "cold" ingredients like yoghurt, cucumber or sugar,' explains *Pomegranates and Roses* author Ariana Bundy.

The art of cooking with roses soon extended far beyond the boundaries of the Middle East.

Throughout the 15th century, Ottoman sultans developed a taste for rose water (a by-product of rose oil) in their sweets and pastries, and as the empire spread westwards, so too did the rose; Bulgaria's Valley of the Roses is famed for producing 85 per cent of the world's rose oil today. In India, petals are ground and added to *lassi* (a thin yoghurt drink), while the French use them to counter the richness of sugar plums and creams. 'The rose isn't sweet,' says Ariana. 'It's delicate, heady, fragrant.' Still a staple in Iranian homes, rose water is trickled into lemonade and baklava and whisked into custards and glazes, while petals are slaked in lemon and lime juice (to preserve colour and texture) and boiled into glossy jams.

The patience and dedication needed to nurture a rose bush into bloom points to the indispensability of this flower in, most particularly, Middle Eastern cuisine. Damask roses don't begin to flower until their third year. 'In warm climates, they should be plucked at dawn while dew still clings to the petals,' says Ghillie Basan, author of *The Middle Eastern Kitchen*. 'Here, they need morning sunlight to awaken their essential oils. The blue, almost lilac hue is a tell-tale sign of good flavour.'

Nearly four tonnes of rose petals are needed to make just 1kg of oil, so the damask rose is literally worth its weight in gold. The dimension of flavour a frugal amount of rose water or petals brings to a dish adds to the otherworldly appeal of this highly prized ingredient in kitchens around the globe. □

RECIPES AND PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN FROM *POMEGRANATES AND ROSES* BY ARIANA BUNDY. PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA LINDER (SIMON & SCHUSTER, £25). TO BUY THE BOOK AT A SPECIAL PRICE, TURN TO READER OFFERS ON PAGE 129