

# Anyone Growing Hawthorn?

Al Chomica - Dec 2022

This may be a misdirected question because if one has hawthorn growing on their property it was likely happily growing there before the property owner was even born. Perhaps the real question should be, 'Is anyone allowing Hawthorn to Grow'? Hawthorn is native to North America and in BC the variety is called, Black Hawthorn, or *Crataegus douglasii*.

The name *Crataegus* is from the Greek word *kratos*, meaning "strength," because of the great strength of the wood. The common name, hawthorn, comes from its early use as a hedge. The Anglo-Saxon *haguthorn* means "a fence with thorns."

Most of the Hawthorn trees around the Nanaimo area are found along old fields where they were likely planted by settlers in the area, sometime after the 1800's. Hawthorn, with its formidable thorns and impenetrable densities, was used as a substitute for barbed-wire fences in the olden days. And once those trees were planted on property lines and along roadsides they naturalized and became somewhat of a 'climax' forest taking full advantage of the opportunities found by living along the neglected edges of farmland and pastures. Most of the foraged berries that make their way into our kitchen are picked from ditches along roadways where the trees have leaned out over the rows and fences along property lines.

At the end of October this year we visited Salt Spring Island and had the unexpected luxury of waiting more than an extra hour in a ferry line-up on our way home. I happened to notice a good crop of berries growing from short trees along the roadway line-up to the ferry. Upon further investigation this plethora of berries turned out to be Hawthorn berries, or Haws, that were in their prime of ripeness. Before the ferry came to pick us up, we were able to pick a huge bag of fresh berries. For the first time ever, that darn ferry came far too quickly!



*Hawthorn leaves are easy to distinguish from most other plants. They are deeply lobed and look somewhat similar to oak leaves.*

*The berries resemble other berries and can be confused with the wild plum or even rosehips. Rosehips however have multiple seeds within the fruit whereas the hawthorn berries have a single pit or stone.*

So, what do we do in our kitchen with these non-sweet and pulpy berries? They don't taste very good and even the birds leave them alone in favour of any other available berries or fruits. Believe it or not, their traditional use is to make ketchup out of them! Fermented ketchup too for that matter. Having grown up on Heinz I don't know why it took so long to discover the real McCoy but it was a Ukrainian recipe group that enlightened me to the vast array of ketchup flavours made in Ukraine. Mayonnaise too for that matter. Chili ketchup, garlic ketchup, herb ketchup and even pizza ketchup are all sold in Ukraine and some of these are available in ethnic shops on the mainland. In Ukraine they call their tomato sauces ketchup and they sell aisles full of all their different flavours. The following picture is all ketchup containers in Ukraine. There are at least 50 or 60 of them. I'm guessing they may even have a Hawthorn Ketchup in there.



Last year we made a batch of fermented ketchup using Hawthorn and some homemade tomato paste that fermented for a few weeks before it was ready. It was the best-tasting ketchup one could imagine and a whole bottle got used up very quickly so the find at Salt Spring was a real bonus that allowed us to make some more. Earlier this year we fermented another batch of ketchup but this time instead of using Hawthorn we used homegrown Goji Berries that had also been fermented. This was a taste never before experienced and was so good we used it all up to concoct a batch of divine Quince/Goji BBQ sauce.

A few other ingredients and some preparations are in order though before the Haws can be consumed. First, they are cleaned and then run through a food strainer to separate the pulp from the woody outer skin, the single seed and the stems. This then gets mixed with a few other ingredients and is then placed in a mason jar with an airlock to lacto-ferment for one or two weeks. It bubbles away the first week and then as the bacterial culture develops, it starts to slow down. When the bubbles almost stop, it is ready to be stored in a bottle in the fridge to be used like normal ketchup, only it is better.

*Eight days after starting off, this Hawthorn ketchup has stopped bubbling away and will be ready to pop open for culinary use. It will stabilize and stop growing when placed in the fridge. Of interest here is the reddish liquid that has risen up into the airlock. Normally when one ferments anything inside a jar, the product has to be kept submerged with some kind of a weighted lid or cap to keep the product from being exposed to surface air where it will mould within a couple days. I can't put any kind of lid on this because it is a liquid slurry and anything put on top will just sink down. The solution to this problem is to fill the jar right to the top and put the lid on. As the fermentation process gets underway the product swells in size due to the formation of Carbon Dioxide. This swelling then forces all the air out of the jar and the inner liquid is pushed up into the airlock. When I see this activity, I know there is no air inside because the jar is packed right to the brim with the Haw slurry that is trying to escape. Obviously, one needs to have a catch tray underneath because the entire countertop can be flooded in a day or two. And because it is a salty brine, it can easily ruin valuable things left on the counter – just ask my wife!*



In this jar, along with the slurry extracted from Hawthorn berries in a 5% brine, the following ingredients were all mixed together before the fermentation process began;

- 1 Cup of pureed ripe Hawthorn Berries or Haws
- 1 Cup of homemade Tomato Paste made from our heirloom line-up.
- 3 Tbs local Big Leaf Maple Syrup (east coast syrup pales in comparison to this robust product)
- 3 Tbs Homemade Fire Cider made from Rosemary Gladstar's epic recipe found online
- 2 Tbs living brine inoculant from a jar of homemade sauerkraut
- 1 ½ Tbs of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce
- ½ tsp of Alder smoked sea salt

It also gets a sprinkle of our homemade Cayenne Pepper and a bit of legendary smoked Paprika from Hungary.

This is then bottled and stored in the fridge where it doesn't seem to last very long...