

JAM REVIEW: LUNAGROWN JAM

JAM EXPERIMENTS: ELIZABETH SEGRAN

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Personality is palpable in every part of LunaGrown's jams. Take the label, for instance. The bottle is peppered with interesting, eccentric details. The image of the moon is an obvious reference to the "luna", but there is also a silhouette of dogs, surrounded by paisley and of course, a vivid image of the fruit in that particular bottle. The whole thing comes across as quirky and eclectic, bearing the mark of the jam's maker. This jam is produced in a place called Cuddebackville, NY – a place that sounds so whimsical, we had to look it up to make sure it was real.

The jam itself is equally unique. We've tasted a lot of jam for this blog. LunaGrown jam can be identified by its texture. Each of the jams we sampled has a very fluid texture, with plenty of syrupy liquid. Yet the jam also has a gel-like consistency, with soft, tender pieces of fruit suspended in it. We went crazy for this texture – every mouthful was slightly different, a mixture of bite and fluid.

Rica Barreja

This was our favorite jam of the three we tasted, and arguably the best jam that we have tasted on our blog so far. When you first open the bottle, you see a rich plum-colored syrupy liquid with huge chunks of fruit in it.

This jam contains an unexpected variety of fruit: strawberry, blackberry, peaches and kiwi. It is a daring combination. These fruit are different along many dimensions: they have different levels of sweetness, acidity, pectin and skin texture. In many jams, the process seems fairly obvious. Here, the process was clearly very complicated. It takes a certain level of expertise to cook such diverse fruit together. The jam maker must have carefully timed the inclusion of each one of these fruit into the mixture, so that the berries don't completely disintegrate, as the peach cooked down.

The flavor of these different fruit come together seamlessly. No one flavor stands out. We particularly loved the inclusion of the rum and vanilla in the jam. It is one of our favorite flavor combination and one that people don't use often enough. In this jam, the rum and vanilla bring the complex flavors together brilliantly. The alcohol adds a level of richness to the jam, balancing the sweetness.

We enjoyed our first taste of Rica Barreja with English muffins, but we quickly decided that we really wanted to taste it with ice cream. It was divine. The texture of the jam goes perfectly with vanilla ice cream. Pieces of fruit sat on top of our scoop and residual liquid dripped around it. However, this jam is so satisfying that we almost wanted to eat it on its own, unadulterated and out of the bottle. It seems a bit decadent, but catch me on a bad day, and I may be on the couch with a jar of Rica Barreja and spoon.



Cranberry-Apple

The first thing we noticed when we opened this jam was the intense and delicious smell. The jam smells of autumn. It smells of apple pie. The texture of the jam is visually similar to the Rica Barreja. The pieces of fruit are suspended in a syrupy, juicy liquid. There are lots of small seeds in the mixture too, which we later discovered were from the cranberry.

Every bite of the jam contains chunks of apple that have a perfect texture. It is soft, but still noticeably in every mouthful. When we tried it, we could have sworn that there was some sort of alcohol in the jam. We were surprised to find that there isn't. The cinnamon and vanilla come together to provide a rich, heady flavor, reminiscent of coconut liquor.

Unlike the previous jam that included so many different flavors, the flavor profile here is clear: the jam maker captures the flavor of apple and cranberry perfectly. Like the previous jam, this one is very sweet, but not cloyingly so. It tastes dessert-like, but eaten on a piece of toast, it contains the perfect level of sweetness.

Cherry

Again, the texture of this jams conforms to the textural theme of the LunaGrown jams. The large chunks of cherry are suspended in a thick, opaque syrup, which is almost like a loose gel. The jam is very dark in color.

I am generally not a fan of cherry jam, because many jam makers go for a sour flavor profile. This jam is not sour at all. I loved it! It has a delicious creamy taste – reminiscent of cherry cream soda. It has a very round, fulfilling flavor. The milkiness of the flavor is a bit of a mystery to us – nothing in the ingredients seems like it would naturally lead to this flavor. Somehow the cinnamon alters the flavor of the cherry to produce a rich, vanilla-like creaminess.

We also felt like there was a richness to the jam. It reminded us of bourbon. It had a dark, woody flavor. It seems miraculous to us that the jam maker is able to draw so much out of the cherry fruit. We could imagine these cherries in a range of mixed drinks. Instead of the regular sour cherries in a martini, the sweetness of these cherries would be a variation on a beloved theme.

