



Thomas Tillman started making cordials 12 years ago in the back yard of his village home in Sweden. Now his hobby has become a company that supplies organic jams and cordials throughout Sweden and Britain. But Tillman has a refreshing attitude to business: 'If the pressure is too hard from some food chain, we say no thank you and go fishing instead.'

Sweden has a rich berry heritage. Its long summer days, when the sun hardly sets, plus dry, cold winters, mean there are plenty of wild berries – blueberries, lingonberries and cloudberries – growing in the forests. 'When I was young, families would pick berries to make jam or saft [cordial] to sell to the great saft producers in Sweden,' recalls Tillman, 39, who still lives near Grangårde in Dalarna, a tranquil area of lakes, pine forests and wooden farmhouses in central

Sweden. 'All sorts of people did it, wealthy and poor. There are not so many people doing this now.' (This hobby is even enshrined in legislation: it is everyone's right in Sweden to walk in the forest and pick mushrooms and berries, even if the land is privately owned.)

In 1979 Tillman's father, Tord, took this a step further by setting up Tillmans Berries and planting 1,000 or so blackcurrant bushes. By the age of 15 Thomas was selling not only his father's berries to juicing companies to make cordial, but also everybody else's. 'I came home from school and from 4-9pm I would buy cloudberries, lingonberries and blueberries to sell on. Some years it was really good,' Tillman reflects nostalgically. 'What a terrible kid I must have been, selling everything!'

By 1990 Tillman was working part-time with

Squat and soft, like a raspberry, they are the colour of apricots, but taste musky, tart, exotic

Left the Arctic cloudberry prefers inhospitable, boggy land. **Below** Thomas Tillman.

Right cloudberry cookies (recipe overleaf).

Food photographs by Joakim Blockström.

Home economist: Joy Skipper



his father, who by now had expanded to 100,000 blackcurrant bushes, and part-time for a company that made grinding machines. In 1996, eager to expand and give up his day job, he set up his own company, processing fruit (such as blackcurrants and strawberries) into jam and saft – he made elderflower saft by pressing flowers by hand through muslin.

Today he employs 25 people, has an out-of-the-way rustic *musteri* (berry factory) with a pressing and bottling room, cafe and shop, and makes all manner of berry products, from lingonberry and Arctic cloudberry jams to rhubarb cordial – all organic and deeply flavoured. On his 70 acres, overlooking Bysjön lake, he grows his own strawberries and blackcurrants and buys in the rest from locals or specialist suppliers because he cannot grow, or pick in the case of wild fruit



Northern lights

The berries of Sweden have caught on like its flat-pack furniture, and the pick of them is the Arctic cloudberry – rare, brief of season and awkward to harvest. **Sally Williams** meets a producer who turns these gems and others into juice and jam. Photographs by **Anders Schonemann**

such as blueberries and cloudberries, the volume required. Business is booming. Ten years ago his main customers were older people who liked Tillmans because it reproduced the intensity of flavour they grew up with. Now it is mainly young families. 'They don't care if this soft costs two kroner more than synthetic soft. They know it's worth it,' Tillman says. His company has had inquiries from the US for lingonberry juice (an unexpected by-product of Ikea's having 186 stores worldwide is that it is spreading Swedish tastes: the lingonberry jam and meatballs served in the cafe, as much as the flat-pack furniture on the shop floor). And ICA, Sweden's leading supermarket, which recently launched an 'I love Eco' organic range, means that Tillman is now working 20-hour days to supply ICA's 2,500 stores. 'It's gone crazy,' he says.

Tillman, who has a partner, Maria, and three young sons, is genial, charismatic and philosophically conservative. Although he heads a growing empire, he prefers to see himself as an amateur. 'I like the Italian style,' he explains. 'You have the factory and fields around you. It's very effective, but not so big.' Business is about his family (he works with his brother, Andreas) and maintaining a lifestyle close to nature, and only indirectly about making money and becoming rich. 'If expanding means Thomas can't keep quality, he'd rather not do it,' says Bo Ahlstedt, the marketing and sales director of Olle Svensson, a Swedish company that supplies wild berries to Tillmans and other outlets throughout



Cloudberry cookies makes 8-10

- 115g butter
- 55g brown sugar
- 125g flour
- 1 egg yolk, beaten (save the white)
- chopped walnuts
- 8-10 tsp Tillmans Arctic cloudberry jam

Cream the butter and sugar together. Add the beaten egg yolk and flour and mix thoroughly. Roll into small balls, dip in the egg white, then roll in the chopped walnuts. Place on a cookie sheet and press the centre of each, forming a small depression. Bake for five minutes at 180C/gas mark 4, and then press the centres again. Bake for a further 10-15 minutes. While they are still warm, fill the centres with the jam.

the world. 'He's strong enough to keep his way of living, because that is important to him.'

Tillmans, of course, is not the only company benefiting from the boom in all things natural, artisanal and organic. The challenge to produce industrial quantities of wild berry-related products – purées, yogurts, juices, jams – faster and cheaper is having a knock-on effect in Sweden, not least in the forests, where wild berries are now treated like any other commodity: something to be manufactured in increasing numbers to satisfy a market. 'The culture changed from picking to harvesting,' says Ahlstedt, who employs some 2,000 migrant Thai pickers every summer.

But one berry in particular is proving resistant

to modern methods: the Arctic cloudberry. These are unlike any other berry you have tasted. Squat and soft, like a raspberry, they are the colour of apricots but taste musky, tart, exotic. In Scandinavia they are used in jams and cordials, served warm in a sauce with ice-cream or cold with cheese. But even on their home turf, cloudberries are something of an enigma. 'They are not like anything else,' Ahlstedt says. 'Cloudberries are exclusive, a delicacy.'

This is mainly because they are so difficult to get hold of. Primarily found in the Arctic Circle, Arctic cloudberries like inhospitable, boggy land (they are also known as bog berries) and in Sweden grow in the remote fir and silver birch

forests of the north, as well as in the mountains of Lapland. Although the plant can withstand temperatures of -40C, the white flowers, which bloom around June, are sensitive to cold and prone to being zapped if temperatures fall below -1C, which they often do in Sweden in the late spring. And when they do ripen, picking Arctic cloudberries is arduous, and not just because of the damp bogs and ferocious mosquitos: the berries do not grow in clumps on bushes but individually, on small stems. In late July they appear, like momentary orange litter, on the forest floor. By early August, the season is over.

And yet the demand for Arctic cloudberries is huge. 'The big change was about 15 years ago,

when wild berries became interesting for health-food enthusiasts because of their antioxidants,' says Ahlstedt, who exports wild blueberries to Japan and claims to have a client in Denmark who is staving off a serious illness by eating 6kg of organic Arctic cloudberries (rich in vitamin C) a month. Arctic cloudberries are very rare, and therefore very expensive: €10 a kilo (blueberries are €3 a kilo), organic ones even more so. 'The landowner has to point out areas he hasn't sprayed with fertiliser,' Ahlstedt explains, adding that fertilisers are often used to boost the life-cycle of fir trees used for timber.

Olle Svensson handles about 200 tons of organic Arctic cloudberries a year (Tillmans

buys 10 tons to make into jam). But it could sell far more than it is possible to pick. 'The challenge is to get our hands on enough product,' Ahlstedt says. The same is true of blueberries, of course, but blueberries can be cultivated commercially. 'They are bigger, but taste of mush,' he says. Arctic cloudberries, on the other hand, cannot be grown commercially. 'There are so many conditions that have to be there to give berries, so we are depending on nature. If it's not growing, it's not growing. We cannot change that.'

Tillmans products are available direct from swedishjuice.com (07957-252390), also from Selfridges and the Organic Delivery Company (020-7739 8181; organicdelivery.co.uk)

Cloudberry cream with lavender and vanilla serves 6

- 700g whipping cream
- 1 vanilla bean, split in half lengthways
- 60g caster sugar
- 160g Tillmans Arctic cloudberry jam
- 1 tbsp finely chopped fresh lavender

Pour the cream into a large bowl. Scrape the seeds out of the vanilla bean and add to the cream, along with the sugar. Whip until stiff, then gently fold in the jam and lavender. Serve immediately in small bowls or a large trifle bowl.

Hamish Anderson's wine choice 2007 Concha y Toro Late Harvest Sauvignon, Maule Valley, Chile £4.99 (half), £3.99 each

for two, Majestic. The fruity cloudberries take a back seat here as it is the musky lavender that you need to worry about. This honeyed, peachy wine is medium-sweet (just right for this dish as it is not intensely sweet), while its floral attributes work with the lavender. Buy two and you will have one of the great sticky bargains on your hands.

Scandinavian cloudberry layer cake serves 16

- 6 medium eggs
- 230g granulated sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 165g plain flour, stirred before measuring
- 350g Tillmans Arctic cloudberry jam
- 500g whipping cream
- 15g icing sugar

Preheat the oven to 180C/gas mark 4. Line two 20cm round cake tins with parchment paper. Crack the eggs into a large bowl and beat them with an electric mixer until frothy. Slowly beat in the sugar and continue beating at high speed for five minutes until light and lemon-coloured. Beat in the vanilla essence and a pinch of salt. With a rubber spatula, fold in the flour thoroughly. Divide the batter evenly between the two tins. Bake for 25-30 minutes, until the cake springs back when touched in the centre. Allow to cool in the tins.

Loosen the edges and remove them from the tins. Split the layers to make four in all. To assemble, place the bottom layer on a cake plate and spread with whipped cream. Top with the second layer. Spread with ¾ of the jam. Top with the third layer and spread with more whipped cream, then top with the fourth layer and spread with the remaining jam. Frost the sides and top of the cake with about half of the remaining cream. Put the rest of the cream into a pastry bag with a star tip (if desired), and press on to the cake decoratively, on top and around the edges. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Opposite one of Thomas Tillman's three sons tends plants on their farm in Dalarna, central Sweden. Cordials and jams are among several berry products made by Tillman's company