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How to Make Homemade Cherry Jam / Cherry Preserves - Easily!

Making and canning your own cherry jam or cherry preserves is also quite easy. The subtle differences cherry jams tend to be more smooth and the fruit is more finely chopped or group, while cherry preserves have more whole fruit pieces.

Just scroll down this page to see how to do it, in easy steps and completely illustrated. These directions work equally well for other small pitted fruits.

For information about cherry festivals, see [cherry festivals](#).

Ingredients and Equipment

- **Cherries** - 3 pounds or 2 quart boxes of fresh whole cherries, preferably fresh cherries, but frozen cherries (without syrup works, too). You can use either sour or sweet cherries.
- **Pectin** (it's a natural product, made from apples and available at grocery stores (season - spring through late summer) and in Wal-mart, grocery stores, etc. It usually goes for about \$2.00 to \$2.50 per box. I use 1.25 boxes per batch - that's right one and another quarter of a box. [See here for more information about how to choose the type of pectin to use.](#)
- **Sugar** - About 2.5 cups of dry, granulated (table) sugar with sweet cherries or 4 cups of sugar if you are using sour cherries. If you use the no-sugar pectin, you can make jam
- **Lemon juice** - 2 tablespoons - for sweet cherry jam, not needed with sour cherries.
- **Jar funnel** (\$2 at WalMart, Target, and sometimes at grocery stores) or order it as part of the kit with the jar grabber.
- **At least 1 large pot**; I prefer 16 to 20 quart Teflon lined pots for easy cleanup.
- **Large spoons and ladles**
- **1 Canner** (a huge pot to sterilize the jars after filling (about \$30 to \$35 at mall kitchen stores, sometimes at WalMart (seasonal item). Note: [we sell canners and supplies here, too - at excellent prices](#) - and it helps support this web site!
- **Ball jars** (Publix, WalMart carry them - about \$7 per dozen 8 ounce jars including the lids and rings)
- **Lids** - thin, flat, round

without added sugar, or with Splenda, but see my note in step about how it affects the jam

- **Jar grabber** (to pick up the hot jars)- WalMart carries it *sometimes* - or order it here. It's a tremendously useful to put cars in the canner and take the hot jars out (without scalding yourself!). The kit sold below has everything you need, and at a pretty good price:



metal lids with a gum binder that seals them against the top of the jar. They may only be used once.

- **Rings** - metal bands that secure the lids to the jars. They may be reused many times.

Optional stuff:

- **Foley Food Mill** (\$25) - not necessary; useful if you want to remove seeds (from blackcherries) or [make applesauce](#).
- **Lid lifter** (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sterilize them. (\$2 at WalMart or it comes in the kit at left)

Cherry Jam-making Directions

The yield from this recipe is about 8 eight-ounce jars (which is the same as 4 pints).

Step 1 - Pick the cherries! (or buy them already picked)

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality ones!

As mentioned in the Ingredients section; you may use frozen cherries (those without syrup or added sugar); which is especially useful if you want to make some jam in December to give away at Christmas!

How much fruit?

You will need about 4 cups of finely chopped, pitted cherries (which is about 3 pounds or 2 quart boxes of fresh whole cherries). You can use sweet or sour cherries, but obviously, you'll need to add more sugar with sour cherries to overcome the sourness!

Jam can **ONLY** be made in rather small batches - about 4 cups at a time - like the directions on the pectin say, **DO NOT** increase the recipes or the jam won't "set" (jell, thicken). (WHY? Alton Brown on the Food Channel says pectin can overcook easily and lose its thickening properties. It is easier and faster to get an even heat distribution in smaller batches.



Step 2 - Wash the jars and lids



Now's a good time to get the jars ready, so you won't be rushed later. The dishwasher is fine for the jars, the water bath processing will sterilize them as well as the contents! If you don't have a dishwasher, you can wash the containers in hot, soapy water and rinse, then sterilize the jars by boiling them 10 minutes, and keep the jars in hot water until they are used.

NOTE: If unsterilized jars are used, the product should be processed for 5 more minutes. However, since this additional processing can result in a poor set (runny jam), it's better to sterilized the jars.

Put the lids into a pan of boiling water for 5 minutes, and use the magnetic "lid lifter wand" to pull them out. Leave the jars in the dishwasher on "heated dry" until you are ready to use them. Keeping them hot will prevent the jars from breaking when you fill them with the hot jam.

Step 3 - Wash and pit the fruit!

I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the fruit in plain cold water.



With cherries you must remove the pits.

There are inexpensive cherry pitters that work fine for occasional use, or larger more

sophisticated pitters if you're going to be doing a lot. As with other fruit, also pick out any stems and leaves.



Step 4 - Finely chop or grind the cherries



For cherry jam, you will want to either finely chop the cherries or grind them (a Foley Food Mill will work for the latter). I've tried just pitting the cherries, but leaving them mostly whole, and it just doesn't turn out as well. Even to make cherry preserves, you need to pit and chop them up some. Otherwise, you get whole cherries suspended in a

sugar solution rather than a consistent jam. just mush them up a bit - not completely crushed, but mostly. Also, chopping, grinding or crushing them releases the natural pectin so it can thicken. You'll need about 4 cups, chopped up.

The Foley food mills (at right) cost about \$30.



Step 5 - Measure out the sugar

If you are using the no-sugar pectin, you can avoid adding any sugar, OR you can add Splenda to taste, or plain sugar, to taste. I generally add about 2.5 cups of sugar to sweet cherries or 4 cups to sour cherries. It seems to give the best results. The no-sugar or Splenda versions just don't have the bright color and the flavor is definitely more bland. You can try using 1 cup of white grape juice instead of sugar - that works better than no sugar, but I still think sugar works best.



Mix the 1 and a quarter boxes of dry pectin with about 1/4 cup of sugar and keep this separate from the rest of the sugar. This helps to keep the pectin from clumping up and allows it to mix better!

Step 6 - Mix the cherries with the pectin and cook to a full boil

Stir the pectin into the cherries and put the mix in a big pot on the stove over medium to high heat (stir often enough to prevent burning). It should take about 5 to 10 minutes to get it to a full boil (the kind that can not be stirred away). **NOTE:** you can add 2 Tablespoons of lemon juice (fresh or bottled) if you are using sweet cherries, to help make it more acid, which helps to prevent spoilage and makes the color brighter. This is not necessary with sour cherries which are naturally more acidic.



Why use pectin? You may run into grandmotherly types who sniff "*I* never used pectin!" at you. Well, sure, and their generation took a horse and buggy to work, died of smallpox and ate canned meat and green beans that tastes like wet newspapers. Old fashioned ways are not always better nor healthier. Pectin, which occurs naturally in fruit, is what makes the jam "set" or thicken. The pectin you buy is just natural apple pectin, more concentrated. Using pectin dramatically reduces the cooking time, which helps to preserve the vitamins and flavor of the fruit, and uses much less added sugar. But, hey, if you want to stand there and stir for hours, cooking the flavor away, who am I to stop you! :) We can probably find an old foot-pedal operated drill for the dentist to use when he fixes the cavities in your teeth from the extra sugar you'll need to add, too...

Notes about pectin: I usually add another pack and add a little) With a little practice, you'll



add about 25% more pectin (just open or else the jam is runnier than I like. find out exactly how much pectin to

get the thickness you like.

Another tip: use the lower sugar or no-sugar pectin. You can add sugar to either and it cuts the amount of sugar you need from 7 cups per batch to as little as 2.5 cups! And it tastes even better! On the other hand; as I said earlier, I have never had success with the No-sugar pectin without adding ANY sugar.



It always turned out runny and bland. You might want to try using the low sugar or no-sugar recipe with a mixture of sugar and Splenda; sugar and white grape juice, or just white grape juice - that will cut down the sugar, but still preserve the flavor.

Is your jam too runny? Pectin enables you to turn out perfectly set jam every time. Made from natural apples, there are also low-sugar pectins that allow you to reduce the sugar you add by almost half!

[Get it here at BETTER prices!](#)

Step 7 - Get the lids sterilizing



Lids: put the lids into a pan of hot water for at least several minutes; to soften up the gummed surface and clean the lids.

Step 8 - Add the remaining sugar and bring to a boil again for 1 minute

When the berry-pectin mix has reached a full boil, add the rest of the sugar (about 4 cups of sugar per batch



of cherries) and then bring it back to a boil and boil hard for 1 minute...

Remove from the heat.

Step 9 - Skim any excessive foam



Foam... What is it? Just jam with a lot of air from the boiling. But it tastes more like, well, foam, that jam, so most people remove it. It is harmless, though. Some people add 1 teaspoon of butter or margarine to the mix in step 6 to reduce foaming, but food experts debate whether that may contribute to earlier spoilage, so I usually omit it and skim.



But save the skimmed foam! You can recover jam from it to use fresh! [See this page for directions!](#)

Step 10 - Testing for "jell" (thickness)



I keep a metal tablespoon sitting in a glass of ice water, then take a half spoonful of the mix and let it cool to room temperature on the spoon. If it thickens up to the consistency I like, then I know the jam is ready. If not, I mix in a little more pectin (about 1/4 to 1/2 of another package) and bring it to a boil again for 1 minute.

Notes about "set" (thickening or jell): It takes 3 ingredients for jams and jellies to set: pectin, sugar and acidity. The amount of pectin that is naturally occurring in the fruit varies from one type of fruit to another and by ripeness (counter intuitively, unripe contains more pectin). [See this page](#) for more about pectin in fruit. It takes the right balance, and sufficient amounts of each of pectin, sugar and acidity to result in a firm jam or

jelly. Lastly, it takes a brief period (1 minute) of a hard boil, to provide enough heat to bring the three together. Generally speaking, if your jam doesn't firm up, you were short in pectin, sugar or acidity or didn't get a hard boil. That's ok - you can "remake" the jam; see [this page!](#)

Step 11 - Optional: Let stand for 5 minutes and stir completely.

Why? Otherwise, the fruit will often float to the top of the jar. This isn't a particular problem; you can always stir the jars later when you open them; but some people get fussy about everything being "just so", so I've included this step! Skipping this step won't affect the quality of the jam at all. I usually don't bother.

You'll also notice that the less sugar you use, the more the fruit will float (chemists will tell you it is due to the decreased density of the solution!)

Step 12 - Fill the jars and put the lid and rings on



Fill them to within 1/4 inch of the top, wipe any spilled jam off the top, seat the lid and tighten the ring around them. Then put them into the boiling water canner!



Step 13 - Process the jars in the boiling water bath

This is where the jar tongs come in really handy! Keep the jars covered with at least 1 inch of water. Keep the water boiling. In general, boil them for 10 minutes, which is what SureJell (the makers of the pectin) recommend. I say "in general" because you have to process (boil) them longer at higher altitudes than sea level, or if you use larger jars, or if you did not sterilize the jars and lids right before using them. The directions inside every box of pectin will tell you exactly. The directions on the



pectin tend to be pretty conservative. Clemson University says you only need to process them for 5 minutes. I usually hedge my bets and start pulling them out after 5 minutes, and the last jars were probably in for 10. I rarely have a jar spoil, so it must work. But you don't want to process them too long, or the jam will turn dark and get runny. See the chart below for altitude adjustment to processing times, if you are not in the sea level to 1,000ft above sea level range.

Note: Some people don't even boil the jars; they just ladle it hot into hot jars, put the lids and rings on and invert them, but putting the jars in the boiling water bath REALLY helps to reduce spoilage! To me, it makes little sense to put all the working into making the jam and then not to process the jars to be sure they don't spoil!



Recommended process time for jams in a boiling water canner.				
		Process Time at Altitudes of		
Style of Pack	Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Half-pints or Pints	5 min	10	15

Step 14 - Remove and cool the jars - Done!



Lift the jars out of the water with your jar lifter tongs and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight) You can then remove the rings if you like.

Once cooled, they're ready to store. I find they last up to 12 months. But after about 6 to 8 months, they get darker in color and start to get runny. They still are safe to eat, but the flavor and texture aren't as good. So eat them in the first 6 months after you prepare them! Another trick is to keep the uncooked cherries or other fruit in the freezer and make and can the jam as needed, so it's always fresh.

Summary - Typical Cost of Making Homemade Cherry Jam - makes 6 jars, 8 oz each**

Item	Quantity	Cost in 2007	Source	Subtotal
Cherries, fresh	3 pounds or 2 quart boxes of fresh whole cherries	\$1.00/lb	Pick your own	\$3.00
Canning jars (8	18 jars	\$7.50/dozen	WalMart, BigLots,	\$10.00

oz size), includes lids and rings			Publix, Kroger	
Sugar	2.5 to 4 cups, depending upon your taste and the type of pectin you use.	\$2.00	WalMart, BigLots, Publix, Kroger	\$2.00
Pectin (no sugar, dry)	1 and a quarter boxes *	\$2.00 per box	WalMart, BigLots, Publix, Kroger	\$2.50
Total				\$17.50 total or about \$3.65 per jar

** - This assumes you already have the pots, pans, ladles, and reusable equipment. Note that you can reuse the jars and reduce the cost further; just buy new lids (the rings are reusable, but the flat lids are not)!

FAQs - Answers to Common Questions

- **As my jars are cooling after i take them out of the canner, they sometimes make a popping or hissing noise. Is this normal and safe?**
Yes, the lids are designed to flex and that's actually a key selling point. You can tell if a jar hasn't sealed properly (after it has cooled completely) if the lid flexes and makes a popping sound when you press the center of the lid with your finger. The popping sounds while it is cooling is the lid being sucked down by the vacuum that is forming inside the jar - which a normal part of the sealing process. Hissing sounds are usually just escaping steam or hot water evaporating on hot surfaces, also normal!
- **Why should cooked jelly be made in small batches?**
If a larger quantity of juice is used, it will be necessary to boil it longer thus

causing loss of flavor, darkening of jelly, and toughening of jelly. It really doesn't work. Trust me; I've tried many times!

- **Can I use frozen cherries instead of fresh?**

Yep! Raspcherries can be particularly hard to find fresh and are expensive! Frozen cherries work just fine, and measure the same. Just be sure to get the loose, frozen whole fruit; not those that have been mushed up or frozen in a sugar syrup!

- **Should jelly be boiled slowly or rapidly?**

It should be boiled rapidly since long, slow boiling destroys the pectin in the fruit juice.

- **What do I do if there's mold on my jellied fruit product?**

Discard jams and jellies with mold on them. The mold could be producing a mycotoxin (poisonous substance that can make you sick). USDA and microbiologists recommend against scooping out the mold and using the remaining jam or jelly.

- **Why did my jellied fruit product ferment, and what do I do?**

Jellied fruit products may ferment because of yeast growth. This can occur if the product is improperly processed and sealed, or if the sugar content is low. Fermented fruit products have a disagreeable taste. Discard them.

- **What happens if my jam or jelly doesn't gel?**

[Remaking cooked runny jam or jelly instructions can be found on this page](#)

- **What is the best way to deseed cherries for jam? I heard a few different ways. A food mill, a ricer, and cheese cloth.**

For large seeds (blackcherries, apples, and larger) I find a Foley Food Mill works best - it's certainly faster and easier than the other methods.

Raspberry and smaller seeds are a real pain. They get stuck in (and clog) or pass through a food mill. Cheesecloth and jelly strainers are messy, take forever and you lose most of the pulp. For these, I find a metal sieve or colander (with small enough holes) and a spatula to help mush them and push the pulp through, is best. Also, heating the mushed up cherries almost to boiling really helps to separate the seeds and pulp.