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How to Make Home-Canned Apple Pie Filling

If you have a surplus of apples, and after making applesauce and apple butter, you want to put up more for the months ahead, then you might want to make your own home canned apple pie filling. Did you think making and canning your own apple pie filling or jam is difficult or expensive? Not at all! Here's how to do it, complete instructions in easy steps and completely illustrated. The apple pie filling will taste MUCH better than that over-sugared tasteless glop in the can from the grocery store, and by selecting the right apples, it will be so naturally-sweet that you won't need to add any sugar at all.



Prepared this way, the jars have a shelf life of 18 months to 2 years, and require no special attention. Now here's how you can, too!

Ingredients and Equipment

Apple Pie Filling Ingredients		
	Quantities of Ingredients Needed to make	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Peeled, cored, sliced fresh apples	3-1/2 cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	3 cups
Corn starch: the USDA recommends a modified cornstarch they developed: Clear Jel® - See the Amazon box below for	1/4 cup	1 and 1/2 cups

<p>where to get it: If you cannot get ClearJel in time, some people use ordinary corn starch and report good results; just not as good as with ClearJel. The USDA insists that ClearJel is much safer than ordinary cornstarch. It's not expensive, so I use it just to be safe.</p> <p>(Note: corn starch is called "corn flour" in the UK)</p> <p>If you can't get the Clear-Jel in time to can, then you may want to try canning the apple slices using this recipe instead.</p>		
Cinnamon	1/2 teaspoon	1 tablespoon
Nutmeg	1/4 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Cloves	1/4 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Ginger	1/4 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Allspice	1/4 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Cold Water	1/2 cup	2-1/2 cups
Apple juice	3/4 cup	5 cups
Bottled lemon juice	2 tbsp	3/4 cup

Equipment:

- vegetable/apple peeler
- Jar grabber (to pick up the hot jars)
- Lid lifter (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sterilize them. (\$2 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates)t)
- Jar funnel (\$2 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates)t)
- At least 1 large pot
- Large spoons and ladles
- Ball jars (Publix, Kroger, other grocery stores and some "big box" stores carry them - about \$8 per dozen quart jars including the lids and rings)
- 1 Water Bath Canner (a huge pot with a lifting rack to sterilize the jars of apple pie filling after filling (about \$30 to \$35 at mall kitchen stores and local "big box" stores, but it's usually cheaper online from our affiliates) You CAN use a large pot instead, but the canners are deeper, and have a rack top make lifting the jars out easier. If you plan on canning every year, they're worth the investment.

Recipe and Directions

Step 1 - Selecting the apples

The most important step! You need apples that are sweet - NOT something like Granny Smith's. Yeah, I know you like them to eat fresh, but you'd have to add a lot of sugar.

Instead, choose apples that are naturally sweet and tart varieties, like: Bramley, Cox Pippin, Fuji, McIntosh, Stayman Winesap, Jonagold, Rome, Cameo, Jonathon. If you can't get



any of these, then try Red Delicious, Honeycrisp, etc. You want a flavorful, aromatic and firm apple (Golden Delicious and Galas are too soft, for example). Always use a mixture - never just one type. The Fuji's and Gala's give it an aromatic flavor! Honeycrisp and Pink Lady are also excellent, sweet, flavorful apples.

Step 2 - How many apples and where to get them

You can pick your own, or buy them at the grocery store. You can also get them in large quantities for prices (in 2005) in the \$14 to \$20 range at the real farmer's markets, like the [Atlanta-Forest park Georgia State Farmer's Market](#) and orchards in the southeast of the U.S. You'll get about 14 to 18 quarts of apple pie filling per bushel of apples, depending upon bruises and size..

Step 3 - 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; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle, the water bath processing will sterilize them as well as the contents! If you don't have a dishwasher with a sterilize cycle, 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. 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 apple pie filling.

Put the lids into a pan of hot, but not quite boiling water (that's what the manufacturer's recommend) for 5 minutes, and use the magnetic "lid lifter wand" to pull them out.

Step 4 -Wash the apples!

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

Step 5 - Peel the apples

The fastest way to peel the apples is one of these peelers! With firm apples, it takes about 20 seconds per apple. These apple peelers don't work well on soft, mushy apples or apples with soft spots on them. In that case your stuck with a hand peeler! But these peelers are SO easy to use, my 3 year old insists on helping... and he does a good job! (see the photo below)

Once they're peeled, remove any remaining brown spots.

These apple peelers work absolutely great on firm apples, pears and potatoes. They don't work so well on apples that are mush or have soft spots. There are 2 types of peelers: those that have a suction base ("Back to Basics", below) and those that clamp on to the edge of a table ("Progressive" below). I prefer the suction type as you can use it more places. Click on the links below for more info or to order one.



Step 6 - Core and Slice

You can use a knife, but the \$5 corer/slicer you see in the photo is the easiest way to do it. The apple corer/slicer, available at almost any large grocery store, kitchen store, Bed Bath and Beyond, mall kitchen stores, Target and other local "big box" stores



With this or an ordinary knife, any slices that are between ¼-inch and 1/2 inch thick will do.

Remove seeds, stems, any hard parts near the seeds and brown or soft spots.

Here are the apple slices, ready for the pie filling!



These corer/slicers are fantastic. Think about it; it makes six slices in the time you can cut one with a knife AND it cores. The one sold here through Amazon.com is better than any I've seen in the stores because it has tall handles (so you won't knock your knuckles) and is washable in the dishwasher. Click on the link below for more info or to order one.

Step 7 - Blanch the Apples

It's pretty simple: place sliced apples at a time in a large pot with at least 1 gallon of boiling water - the larger the pot and the greater the volume of water, the better! Boil each batch 1 minute after the water returns to a boil. You're not really "cooking" the apples - just blanching them. Blanching means heating at high temperature for a



brief time to stop the enzymes that can cause the flavor to degrade during storage.

Drain and keep the hot cooked fruit in a covered bowl or pot.

Step 8 - Make the liquid for the filling

Combine the sugar and cinnamon in a large pot with the apple juice and water.

Yes, you can vary the amount of sugar, you can use less sugar or a mixture of sugar and Splenda. You could use organic sugar or honey (about 3/4 cup of honey to replace each cup of sugar)



You could use water instead of apple juice.

But best results will come from staying fairly close to the recipe. I've had excellent results using half the amount of sugar and adding other spices (typically some nutmeg and cloves, in addition to the cinnamon).

Step 9 - Heat the liquid

Stir almost constantly while cooking on medium high heat until the mixture begins to bubble.

Mix the ClearJel or corn starch with the lemon juice and add this to the juice in the pot. Boil 1 minute, stirring constantly, until it starts to thicken. Then remove from the heat./ It ought to be pretty thick, but still able to drip.

Note: According to the USDA's National Home Food Preservation Center at the University of Georgia, ClearJel® is a corn starch that has been modified to give it special and unique characteristics when used in food products. It is recommended by the USDA for making pie fillings because it does not break down in the acid food mixtures and does not thicken enough during heat processing to interfere

with the intended effect of the heat on killing bacteria during canning. In other words it reduces spoilage and is safer than corn starch. It is preferred for thickening canned pie fillings as well as other foods over other corn starches because it has less or no aftertaste, the thickened juices are smooth and clear, and foods thickened with ClearJel® may be frozen.

If you want to freeze the filling instead of can it, just fill your freezer containers (typically ZipLoc bags or plastic containers) or an uncooked apple pie crust, exclude air and seal! then pop it into a deep freeze and ignore the remaining steps below.



Step 10 - Fill the jars with the apple slices and liquid.

As the liquid is now very thick, it won't easily flow, so you need to fill the jars by alternating layers of liquid, then apple slices then liquid, until the jar is full to 1 inch below the top.



After each layer I use a spoon, blunt knife or my fingers to press down to fill any air spaces with liquid. A jar funnel helps. Gently jostle the jar and lightly press the slices to help them settle in the jar and reduce the amount of air space. Pack the jars tightly with apples. If you don't, the apples will float and the bottom of the jar will be nothing but syrup.



Step 11 - Finish removing air spaces and seal the jars

Fill them to within 1/2 to 1 inch of the top, and jostle and press the slices down to fill any obvious air spaces, wipe any spilled apple pie filling of the top, seat the lid and tighten the ring around them.



Step 12 - Process the filled jars in the water bath

Put them in the canner and keep them cover with at least 1 inch of water and boiling. if you are at sea level (up to 1,000 ft) boil pint and/or quart jars for 25 minutes.



If you are at an altitude of 1,000 feet or more, see this chart.

USDA-Recommended process time for Hot Pack Pint or Quart Jars of Apple Pie Filling in a boiling-water canner.			
Process Time at Altitudes of			
0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 3,000 ft	3,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
25 min	30	35	40

Step 13 - Remove and cool the jars - Done

Lift the jars out of the water 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 the jars are cool, you can check that they are sealed verifying that the lid has been sucked down. Just press in the center, gently, with your finger. If it pops up and down (often making a popping sound), it is not sealed. If you put the jar in the refrigerator right away, you can still use it. Some people replace the lid and reprocess the jar, then that's a bit iffy. If you heat the contents back up, re-jar them (with a new lid) and the full time in the canner, it's usually ok.



Making a pie from canned pie filling

So later, how do you use the canned pie filling to make a pie? Easy! Make your crust (see this page), preheat the oven to 425 F. Pour the pie filling into pie crust. Use as little of the liquid as you need, and fill the pie with mostly apples! By minimizing the liquid, that will result in a firmer more appley pie!

Sprinkle with a crumb topping ([see this page for the crumb topping](#)) or dough (which ever or none, as you prefer). then cook the pie at 425 F for 10 minutes, then turn the heat down and cook at 375 F for another 45 minutes to 1 hour.

This document was adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 1994. Reviewed June 2006.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I've canned apple pie filling in the past and your recipe looked interesting as it did not contain cornstarch and I liked the idea of making the sauce out of apple juice instead of water. Your recipe called for using 2 tablespoons of Clear Jel Starch, which I didn't have on hand so I used 2 tablespoons of Arrowroot instead. 2 tablespoons of thickening agent didn't seem like enough, but I had never worked with Clear Jel so I wasn't sure. In any case, the "sauce" part of my pie filling is too thin. Is Arrowroot not an appropriate substitute or should I have used more? And now I am in a dilemma as well now that the canning is finished (I thought it would perhaps thicken as it cooled). When I use the filling, I can strain the apples and thicken the sauce... how would you suggest I do that? My other question is if it is possible to thicken the sauce of all the jars and re-can them, or would that pose safety concerns? I love to give the filling away as gifts around Thanksgiving, but I could always bake the pies and give those away instead! In any case, if you could assist me with these questions I would be most

appreciative!!!! And THANKS for your website... it is a great resource and is now saved as a favorite!!

Arrowroot has different properties; I'm not sure what the exchange rate would be or how well it holds up. The unique aspect of Clear-Jel is that the USDA has tested it in home canning recipes for both quality and safety, so we know it works and is safe.

Of course, with a filling that is too thin, you can always add any starch (corn starch, for example) when the filling is opened to make a pie. You could even just attached a ziplock bag with a little (say 7 tablespoons per quart jar) of starch to each jar for the gifts.

I wouldn't go back and remake the jars that are already sealed. If you open each jar, add starch, heat it up and reprocess the jars with new lids, it would be safe, but that's a lot of work.

Other Equipment:

From left to right:

1. Jar lifting tongs to pick up hot jars
2. Lid lifter - to remove lids from the pot of boiling water (sterilizing)
3. Lid - disposable - you may only use them once
4. Ring - holds the lids on the jar until after the jars cool - then you don't need them.
5. Canning jar funnel - to fill the jars and keep the rims clean.

