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How to Make Homemade Canned Peaches, Plums, Pears, Plums, Nectarines and Cherries

You think making and canning your own peaches, pears, plums, cherries or nectarines is difficult or expensive? Not at all! Here's how to do it, complete instructions in easy steps and completely illustrated. In the winter when you open a jar, the peaches will taste MUCH better than anything you've ever had from a store, and by selecting the right fruit, it will use less sugar than store-bought canned peaches. Peaches, pears, plums, cherries or nectarines can be packed in very light, light or medium sugar syrup. They can also be packed in water, apple juice or white grape juice.

Prepared this way, the jars have a shelf life of about 12 to 18 months, and aside from storing in a cool, dark place, require no special attention. If you'd rather freeze your fruit, see my page on [how to freeze peaches, plums, nectarines, figs and cherries](#). Even easier than canning and they will taste just like fresh.. but it does take up space in the freezer.



And here are some [great and easy peach desert recipes!](#)

Ingredients and Equipment

Fruit (see step 1)

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 Wal-Mart)

Jar funnel (\$2 at Wal-Mart)

At least 1 large pot

Large spoons and ladles

Ball jars (Publix, Wal-Mart carry them - about \$8 per dozen quart jars including the lids and rings)

Sugar (or fruit juice, or Splenda, or just water!)

1 Water Bath Canner (a huge pot with a lifting rack to sterilize the jars of peaches after filling (about \$30 to \$35 at mall kitchen stores, Wal-Mart) 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 peaches, plums, cherries or nectarines



The most important step! You need peaches that are sweet, and to make the work easier, cling-free (also called freestone). This means that the peach separates easily from the pit! Same with nectarines, and this doesn't apply to cherries or plums. Don't miss the [peach picking tips page!](#)

Choose ripe, mature fruit of ideal quality for eating fresh or cooking. They should not be mushy, but they also should not be rock hard: just as ripe as you would eat them fresh.

After this step, I'll just refer to "peaches" but it applies to plums, pears, cherries and nectarines.

Step 2 - How many peaches and where to get them

You can pick your own, or buy them at the grocery store. But for large quantities, you'll find that real* farmer's markets, like the Farmer's Market in Forest Park, Georgia have them at the best prices.

It takes about 5 good sizes peaches or nectarines (or about 10 plums) to fill one quart jar. An average of $17\frac{1}{2}$ pounds is needed per canner load of 7 quarts; an average of 11 pounds is needed per canner load of 9 pints. A bushel weighs 48 pounds and yields 16 to 24 quarts — an average of $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds per quart.

* - not the cutesy, fake farmer's markets that are just warehouse grocery stores that call themselves farmer's markets.

Step 3 - Prepare the sugar (or other sweetener) solution

Peaches must be packed in a solution of water and sugar or fruit juice. It's up to you which to use. Sugar is added to improve flavor, help stabilize color, and retain the shape of the fruit. It is not added as a preservative. Sugar solution is much less expensive (unless you have a supply of cheap grape juice), so I usually use a light solution to keep sugar (and the added calories) to a minimum.



Sugar Syrup

Syrup	Sugar	Water	Yield
Light	2 cups	6 cups	7 cups
Medium	3 cups	6 cups	6 1/2 cups
Heavy	4 cups	6 cups	7 cups

NOTE: you can ALSO use fruit juice (if you want a natural alternative) or water or artificial sweetener (Splenda, but NOT Nutrasweet; if you want a low calorie alternative). [Click here for instruction about how to prepare these sugarless, fruit juice, or Splenda solutions!](#)

To prepare syrup, while heating water, add sugar slowly, stirring constantly to dissolve. Bring to a gentle boil and keep it simmering. After preparing the liquid syrup, keep it hot (but not boiling).

Step 4 - Wash the jars and lids



This is a good time to get the jars ready! The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle - put the lids into a pan of boiling water for at least several minutes. I just put the lids in a small pot of almost boiling water for 5 minutes, and use the magnetic "lid lifter wand" (available from WalMart, Target, and sometimes at grocery stores) to pull them out.

Step 5 - Wash the peaches!

I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the peaches in plain cold or lukewarm water



Step 6 - Peeling the Peaches



Nope, we're not going to peel them by hand; that's way too much work. Instead, here's a great trick that works with many fruits and vegetables with skins (like tomatoes): just dip the fruit in boiling water for 20 to 45 seconds. Remove from the water using a slotted spoon and put

into a large bowl or pot of cold water and ice.



<http://www.PickYourOwn.org/peachescanning.htm>

The skins will easily slide off now!

Nectarines do not need to be peeled, if you don't mind the skins.



Step 7 - Cut up the peaches



Cut out any brown spots and mushy areas. Cut the peaches in half, or quarters or slices, as you prefer! Remove pits!

Step 8 - Prevent the fruit from darkening!



Peaches will turn brown when exposed to air, even air in a sealed, sterile jar. To keep the fruit from turning brown, when you get a bowlful, sprinkle 1/4 cup lemon juice or Fruit-Fresh (which is just citric acid, vitamin C, perfectly natural). Then stir the peaches to make sure all the surfaces have been coated.



Step 9 - For a Hot Pack



Hot packing is recommended for all fruits because it is a bit safer and makes fruit easier to pack in jars. Hot packed peaches are also less likely to float than peaches canned by the raw-pack method. Just put the cut peaches into the barely boiling syrup solution for 5 minutes. **(If you want to use the "cold pack" or "raw pack" method, just skip this step!)**

Hot packing also helps to reduce air entrapment (bubbles) as the cell structure of peaches tends to retain air; which is released during the heating prior to the jars being filled. Hot packing also tends to produce brighter colors.

Step 10 - Fill the jars

Pack the peaches into sterilized jars (leaving 1/2 to 1 inch space at the top) and cover with boiling sugar syrup leaving 1/2 inch head space. (if you don't cook or heat the peaches first, this is called "cold packing"). Run a rubber spatula or table knife gently between peaches and jar to release trapped air bubbles. To do this more effectively, tilt the jar slightly while running the tool between the fruit and the edge of the jar and also pressing inward against the fruit a few times.



<http://www.PickYourOwn.org/peachescanning.htm>

After packing the peaches in the jar, pour the sugar solution up to 1/2 inch (1 cm) from the top. The fruit should be covered completely. If you have problems with fruit darkening (turning brown) later, then sprinkle 1/2 teaspoon of FruitFresh or ascorbic acid into the top of the jar before you seal it.

Wipe rim and screw threads with a clean damp cloth. Add lid, screw band and tighten firmly and evenly. Do not over tighten.

Tips!



Canned fruits often will float if the sugar syrup is too heavy, if jars are packed too loosely or if air remains in the tissues of the fruit after processing. To avoid this use a light or medium sugar syrup, make sure fruit is firm and ripe and pack fruit tightly in jars without crushing.

If fruit is not covered by liquid it may darken during storage (but does not necessarily mean it is spoiled, as all fruits will darken somewhat). To avoid this be sure fruit is covered by remove air bubbles from jars liquid while still leaving the recommended head space. Also be sure to remove trapped air bubbles as described earlier.

Peaches, pears and apples may also show a blue, red or pink color change after canning. This is the result of natural chemical changes that sometimes occur as fruits are heated. It is harmless and won't affect flavor!

Also, avoid storing canned food near heat sources such as a furnace, water heater, hot water or sunny areas. Jars need to be kept cool and dark for longer storage life and to protect against spoilage. Be sure to store in a dry place. If the lid or band rusts, that can cause the seal to break.

Step 11 - Process the jars in the water bath

Put the sealed jars in the canner and keep them cover with at least 1 inch of water and boiling. In general, if you are at sea level, boil them for at least 20 minutes (and no more than 30 min).

Here are more specific guidelines from the USDA for canning peaches in a boiling-water, a dial, or a weighted-gauge canner:



Table 1. Recommended process time for Peaches, halved or sliced in a boiling-water canner.

		Process Time at Altitudes of			
Style of Pack	Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 3,000 ft	3,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Pints	20 min	25	30	35
	Quarts	25	30	35	40
Raw	Pints	25	30	35	40
	Quarts	30	35	40	45

Table 2. Process Times for Peaches (Halved or Sliced) in a Dial-Gauge Pressure Canner.

			Canner Pressure (PSI) at Altitudes of			
Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (Min)	0 - 2,000 ft	2,001 - 4,000 ft	4,001 - 6,000 ft	6,001 - 8,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints or Quarts	10	6	7	8	9

Table 3. Process Times for Peaches (Halved or Sliced) in a Weighted-Gauge Pressure Canner.

			Canner Pressure (PSI) at Altitudes of	
Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (Min)	0 - 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints or Quarts	10	5	10

Step 12 - Remove and cool



Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight), here they won't be bumped. 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 (with a new lid) and reprocess the jar, while it's still hot for the full time in the canner - that's acceptable!

