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How to Make Homemade Plum Jam or Pluot Jam, Damson, Jam, Nectarine Jam, Etc. Easily!

Yield: 8 to 10 eight-ounce (half-pint) jars



Making and canning your own Plum jam, Damson jam, Pluot, "Dinosaur Egg" plums, Gage jam or Nectarine jam is so easy. Here's how to do it, in 12 simple steps and completely illustrated. I'll discuss plums below, but you can substitute peaches, plums or nectarines! Any variations will be spelled out in the directions inside the pectin. This stuff is awesome; if you never had plum jam, you don't know what you're missing!

For more information about stone fruits, see

[Peach Picking Tips](#)

Ingredients

- Fruit: Plums, Gages, Damson's, Pluots or Nectarines - 5 pints (which is: 10 cups, or 2.25 liters, about 3.5 lbs, almost 1.75 kg) fresh.
- Lemon juice - either fresh squeezed or bottled. 1/4 cup.
- Water - 1/2 cup
- Sugar - About 4.5 cups of dry, granulated (table) sugar. It is possible to make low-sugar, fruit juice-sweetened, or Splenda-sweetened fig jam; I'll point out the differences below.
- Pectin (it's a natural product, made from apples and available at grocery stores (season - spring through late summer) and local "big box" stores. It usually goes for about \$2.00 to \$2.50 per box. [See here for more information about how to choose the type of pectin to use.](#)



Equipment

- Jar funnel (\$2 at Target, other big box stores, and often grocery stores; and available online - see this page) 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 big box stores and grocery stores.). Note: [we sell canners and supplies here, too - at excellent prices](#) - and it helps support this web site!
- Ball jars (Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger, Safeway carry them, as do some big box stores - about \$7 per dozen 8 ounce jars including the lids and rings)

- Lids - thin, flat, round 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.
- Jar grabber (to pick up the hot jars)- Big box stores and grocery stores sometimes carry them; and it is available online - see this page. It's a tremendously useful to put jars 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:



Optional stuff:

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

Plum (and/or peach, plum or nectarine) Jam-making Directions

This example shows you how to make jam from plums (and other stone fruits)! The yield from this recipe is about 10 eight-ounce jars (which is the same as 5 pints). You can make any one, or mix fruit. Some people seem to like plum-pineapple or peach-pineapple combinations, also. (crush the pineapple)



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



It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality ones! (Damsons are shown in the photo at left)

I prefer to grow my own; which is really easy - but that does take some space and time. As mentioned in the Ingredients section; you may use frozen Plums (those without syrup or added sugar); which is especially useful if you want to make some jam in December to give away at Christmas!

Step 2 - How much fruit?

Jam can ONLY be made in rather small batches - about 6 cups at a time - like the directions on the pectin say, DO NOT increase the recipes or the jam won't "set" (jell, thicken). It takes about 8 cups of raw, unprepared Plums per batch. For mixed fruit jam, I use 4 cups of mashed (slightly crushed) Plums, 1 cup of raspberries and 1 cup of blackberries. That makes a nice combo-jam.

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.



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 sterilize the jars.

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.

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.

Lids: put the lids into a pan of boiling water for at least several minutes; to soften up the gummed surface and clean the lids. I just leave them in there, with the heat on very low, until I need them!

Step 4 -Wash the fruit and sort!



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

Then you need to pick out and remove any bits of stems, leaves and soft or mushy fruit. It is easiest to do this in a large bowl of water and gently run your hands through the fruit as they float. With your fingers slightly apart, you will easily feel any soft or mushy fruit get caught in your fingers.

Then just drain off the water!

Step 5 - Peeling the Plums

Plums and nectarines should be peeled, as their skins can be tough / chewy in jam. If you do want to leave the skins in, you might want to run the fruit through a blender to chop them up (after you remove the pits, of course). I prefer peeled (both for texture and pesticides are concentrated in the skins, so with store-bought plums, this helps eliminate more of the bad stuff!) For those you want to peel, here's a great trick that works with many fruits and vegetables with skins

(like tomatoes): just dip the fruit in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds.



Remove from the water using a slotted spoon and put into a large bowl or pot of cold water and ice.



The skins will easily slide off now I F the plums are ripe! The more unripe they are, the longer you'll need to heat them.



Step 6 - Cut up the plums



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

Step 7 - Prevent the fruit from darkening!



Now, 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 plums to make sure all the surfaces have been coated.



Step 8 - Measure out the sweetener

Depending upon which type of jam you're making (sugar, no-sugar, Splenda, mix of sugar and Splenda or fruit juice) you will need to use a different amount of sugar and type of pectin. The precise measurements are found in directions inside each and every box of pectin sold (every brand, Ball, Kerr, Mrs. Wages, etc. has directions inside).

Type of jam	Type of pectin to buy	Sweetener
regular	no-sugar or regular	7 cups of sugar
low sugar	no-sugar	4.5 cups of sugar
lower sugar	no-sugar	2 cups sugar and 2 cups of Splenda
no sugar	no-sugar	4 cups of Splenda
natural	no-sugar	3 cups fruit juice (grape, peach, apple or mixed)

Step 9 - Mix the dry pectin with about 1/4 cup of sugar or other sweetener



Keep this separate from the rest of the sugar. If you are not using sugar, you'll just have to stir more vigorously to prevent the pectin from clumping.



Notes about pectin: I usually add about 20% more pectin (just open another pack and add a little) or else the jam is runnier than I like. With a little practice, you'll find out exactly how much pectin to get the thickness you like.

Step 10 - Mix the Plums with the pectin and cook to a full boil

Stir the pectin into the Plums 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 cannot be stirred away).

Step 11 - Add the remaining sugar and bring to a boil

When the berry-pectin mix has reached a full boil, add the rest of the sugar (about 4 cups of sugar per 6 cup batch of Plums) or other sweetener, and then bring it back to a boil and boil hard for 1 minute.



Step 12 - 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/s to 1/2 of another package) and bring it to a boil again for 1 minute.



Step 13 - Fill the jars and put the lid and rings on



Fill them to within ¼-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!



This is where the jar tongs and lid lifter come in really handy!



Step 14 - Process the jars in the boiling water bath

Keep the jars covered with at least 2 inches of water. Keep the water boiling. In general, boil them for 5 minutes. 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 7 minutes, and the last jars were probably in for 10. I rarely have a jar spoil, so it must work.



Step 15 - 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.

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!

Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Plum Jam - makes 8 jars, 8 oz each**				
Item	Quantity	Cost in 2009	Source	Subtotal
Plums	1 gallon	\$8.00/gallon	Pick your own	\$8.00
Canning jars (8 oz size), includes lids and rings	10 jars	\$7.00/dozen	Grocery stores, like Public, Kroger, Safeway and sometimes, Big Lots, local hardware stores and big box stores	\$6.00
Sugar	5 cups	\$2.00	Grocery stores, like Public, Kroger, Safeway and sometimes, Big Lots, local hardware stores and big box stores	\$2.00
Pectin (low sugar, dry)	1 and a quarter boxes	\$2.00 per box	Grocery stores, like Public, Kroger, Safeway and sometimes, Big Lots, local hardware stores and big box stores	\$2.70
Total				\$18.70 total or about \$1.87 per 8 oz jar
* - This assumes you already have the pots, pans, ladles, and reusable equipment. Note that you can reuse the jars, and that reduces the cost! Just buy new lids (the rings are reusable, but the flat lids are not)!				

Answers to Common Questions

- 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 fruit instead of fresh?
Yep! Raspberries can be particularly hard to find fresh and are expensive! Frozen fruit 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](#)

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.

