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## How to Make Cherry Jelly at Home - Easily!

**Yield:** 3 pint jars or 6 eight-ounce jars

Making and canning your own cherry jelly is also quite easy. The subtle differences cherry jellies 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 the [cherry festivals](#) page.

### Ingredients

- **Cherries** - 4 cups cherry juice (about 3.5 pounds or 2 quart boxes of fresh cherries and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water) 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 local "big box" stores. 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.](#)
- **Lemon juice** - 2 tablespoons - for sweet cherry jelly, not needed with sour cherries.
- **Sugar** - About 3 or 4 cups of dry, granulated (table) sugar with sweet cherries or 4 or 5 cups of sugar if you are using sour cherries. If you use the no-sugar pectin, you can make jelly without added sugar, or with Splenda, Stevia or honey, but see my note in step about how it affects the jelly.

## 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.
- **Jelly strainer** - Here's what they look like and where to get one. Cheesecloth from the grocery store can be used in a pinch, but it wastes more and is more difficult to use.



- **Cherry pitter:** without one of these, it's pretty hard to remove the pits from a fresh cherry.  
I'm trying this Norpro pitter out right now. Reviewers say it can handle larger volumes of cherries reliably!  
**A visitor writes on July 1, 2010:** "I wanted to let you know about the Norpro Deluxe Cherry Stoner/Pitter. These things are GREAT!!! They pit cherries reliably and remarkably fast! Just tell your readers to NOT lose the orange inserts (they may be other colors now) that come with the cherry pitter. They're definitely necessary to actually pit the cherries."
- **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 sanitize 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.
- **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:



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

#### Optional stuff:

- **Lid lifter** (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sanitize them. (\$2 at big box stores or it comes in the kit at left)

## Cherry Jelly making Directions

The yield from this recipe is about 6 eight-ounce jars (which is the same as 3 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!

Jelly 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 jelly 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; especially if it has a "sanitize" cycle, the water bath processing will sanitize them as well as the contents! If you don't have a dishwasher with a sanitize cycle, you can wash the containers in hot, soapy water and rinse, then sanitize the jars by boiling them 10

minutes, and keep the jars in hot water until they are used.

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

### 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.



Pit the fresh cherries, and keep them in cold water with 1/4 lemon juice add (to prevent browning)



A cherry pitter is inexpensive and easy to use, once you learn the trick. The goal is to push down so the metal stem holds the pit down against the opening in the bottom of the cup. The pits will not go through the hole; it is just to help trap

them. then releasing your grip, the cherry rides up on the metal stem, while the pit remains trapped in the cup, stuck in the hole. Then just push the cherry off and use your thumb on the underside of the cup, to push the pit back out.



I'm trying this one out right now. Reviewers say it can handle larger volumes of cherries reliably!

#### **Step 4 - Finely chop or grind the cherries to extract the juice**

For cherry jelly, you will want to either finely chop the cherries or grind them (a food processor, blender or chopper works, and a juicer is absolutely ideal! Also, chopping, grinding or crushing them releases the natural pectin so it can thicken. You'll need about 6 to 8 cups, chopped up to yield about 4 cups of juice. It varies a lot, and you can add some water to it to make up the difference.



#### **Step 5 - Heat the crushed cherries on the stove**

We just want to bring the cherries to a simmer to help release the juice and break down some of the fruit to help it pass through our jelly strainer. Put the crushed cherries in a big pot on the stove over medium to high heat (stir often enough to prevent burning) for until it starts to boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. If you used a juicer, then you can skip this step and go straight to step 8.

## Step 6 - Sieve the cooked cherries

You can either put the soft cooked cherries through a jelly strainer (about \$9.00, see ordering at right) which results in the most clear jelly and is easiest to use, or pour them through cheesecloth in a colander. Or if you don't mind chunky jelly, just let the juice stand for 20 minutes, and decant (pour off) the clear liquid to use and leave the solids behind.

You may also want to run the crushed cooked cherries through a Foley food mill ([about \\$20 - see this page](#)) BEFORE the jelly strainer - it helps to extract more juice and get out the large skins that will clog the strainer. It's not necessary, but helps you get the most out of the cherries.

If you need a stopping point and want to finish up the next day, this is a good place. Sometimes, jelly gets crystals, called tartrate crystals, forming in the jelly. They're not harmful and don't affect the taste, but some people don't like the appearance. I rarely even see them! But if you do, let juice stand in a cool place overnight, then strain through two thicknesses of damp cheesecloth to remove any crystals that have formed.



### Step 7 - Add the pectin to the hot strained juice and bring to a full boil

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. If you are not using sugar, you'll just have to stir more vigorously to prevent the pectin from clumping. This helps to keep the pectin from clumping up and allows it to mix better!



Stir the pectin into the cherry juice 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).

### Step 8 - 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 3 to 4 cups of sugar to sweet cherries or 4 to 5 cups to sour cherries. It is to suit your taste! 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.



**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 jelly "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! :) Having said that, there are some fruits that have naturally high amounts of pectin ( [see this page for a list](#) ) and they simply don't need much or even any added pectin.

**Notes about pectin:** I usually add about 25% more pectin (just open another pack and add a little) or else the jelly is runnier than I like. With a little practice, you'll find out exactly how much pectin to get the thickness you like.

Another tip: use the 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 jelly too runny? Pectin enables you to turn out perfectly set jelly every time. Made from natural apples, there are also natural no-sugar pectins that allow you to reduce the sugar you add by half or even eliminate sugar.!

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

**Step 9 - Get the lids warming in hot (but not boiling) water**

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 10 - Add the remaining sugar and bring to a boil again for 1 minute**

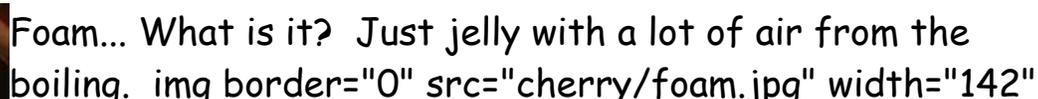
When the berry-pectin mix has reached a full boil, add the rest of the sugar (about 4 cups of sugar per batch of cherries) and then bring it back to a boil and boil hard for 1 minute... If you bring it back to a full boil fairly slowly (on medium heat rather than high) that will help reduce foaming.



Remove from the heat. p>

**Step 11 - Skim any excessive foam**



Foam... What is it? Just jelly with a lot of air from the boiling.  But it tastes more like, well, foam, that jelly, 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 jelly from it to use fresh! [SeSee this page for directions!](#)

**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 jelly 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 jelly 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 jelly; see [this page](#)!

**Step 13 - 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 jelly at all. I usually don't bother.

YoYou'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 14 - Fill the jars and put the lid and rings on**

Fill them to within  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch of the top, wipe any spilled jelly 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 come in really handy!

### Step 15 - 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 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 sanitize 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 jelly 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. p>

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 jelly and then not to process the jars to be sure they don't spoil!



Recommended process time for jellies 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 16 - 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 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! Another trick is to keep the uncooked cherries or other fruit in the freezer and make and can the jelly as needed, so it's always fresh.