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

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



Making and canning your own Plum jelly, Damson jelly, Pluot, "Dinosaur Egg" plums, Gage jelly or Nectarine jelly 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 jelly, you don't know what you're missing!

For more information about stone fruits, see

[Peach Picking Tips](#)

See this page for [blueberry jam](#), this one for [fig jam](#) and for berry jams, see [strawberry, blackberry, raspberry jam](#) For easy [applesauce](#) or [apple butter](#) directions, click on these links. I've got some other pages for specific types of jam and butters, too, [see this page](#)

## Ingredients

- **Fruit: Plums, Gages, Damson's, Pluots or Nectarines** - 4 pints of prepared fruit (which is: 8 cups, or 2 liters, about 3 lbs, almost 1.50 kg) fresh, or frozen prepared fruit.
- **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** - **get the "no sugar needed" type** - (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 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.
- **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 sanitize them. (\$2 at big box stores or it comes in the kit at left)

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

This example shows you how to make jelly from plums (and other stone fruits)! The yield from this recipe is about 8 to 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-raspberry, plum-blackberry combinations, also. Even plum-pineapple (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 jelly in December to give away at Christmas!

### **Step 2 - How much fruit?**

Jellies and jams can ONLY be made in rather small batches - about 5 to 6 cups at a time - like the directions on the pectin say, DO NOT increase the recipes or the jelly won't "set" (jell, thicken). It takes about 8 cups of raw, unprepared Plums per batch. For mixed fruit jelly, I use 4 cups of mashed (slightly crushed) Plums, 1 cup of raspberries and 1 cup of strawberries or blackberries. That makes a nice combo-plum jelly. Raspberries and plums seem to go very well together, blackberries add a nice flavor, too.

### **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 "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 jam), 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.

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 jelly. 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 IF 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 a mix of citric acid and 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 jelly 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 jelly	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. Be sure to use a "No sugar needed" pectin rather than the regular pectin. It works with any amount of any sweetener and ensures a better set.

**Notes about pectin:** I usually add about 20% 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.



### **Step 10 - Heat the chopped plums to a simmer**

We just want to bring the plums 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 or chopped plums 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 11 - Sieve the cooked plums**

You can either put the soft cooked plums 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 plums through a Foley food mill ([about \\$20 - see this page](#)) BEFORE the jelly strainer - it helps to extract more juice, reduce the plums to a smaller size and get out the large skins that will clog the strainer. It's not necessary, but helps you get the most out of the plums.



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 12 - 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 plum 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 13 - Add the (remaining) sugar and bring to a boil**

When the plum-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 14 - 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/s to 1/2 of another package) and bring it to a boil again for 1 minute.



#### Step 15 - 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 and lid lifter come in really handy!



## Step 16 - 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 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 7 minutes, and the last jars were probably in for 10. I rarely have a jar spoil, so it must work.

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!

## Step 17 - 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!