

Preserving Traditions

Instructor's Guide:

Making & Canning Strawberry Jam

Canning can kill people if not done properly. If you've not canned before, or only canned once or twice, I suggest getting an expert to lead this workshop.

Goals

At the end of the workshop, participants will

- Know what foods can be safely water-bath canned
- Know the risks of home-canned foods and how to avoid them

Process their own strawberries into about a pint of canned strawberry jam.



Logistics

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| Demo or workshop? | Workshop |
| Duration | 3 hours |
| Maximum participants | Depends on how many burners you have. You need 1 burner for every 2 participants, plus one for the canning kettle. If you have 2 stoves and 2 portable burners, you can fit 8 people. |
| Participants bring | Each person brings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One pint-size Mason jar (canning jar) with lid and band • ~1 quart of fresh strawberries • 1 c. sugar |
| Presenter brings | For 8 people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few spare half-pint canning jars, lids, and bands • 1 cup of bottled lemon juice |
| Equipment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knife, cutting board, and large bowl for each participant (participants might also bring their own) • Water bath canner and rack • Canning accessories: Jar lifter, funnel, lid lifter • Small saucepan to warm lids • Large frying pans – one per burner • Large spoons and ladles • Hot pads • Timer or clock • Small porcelain or glass plates or saucers • Freezer or cooler of ice |
| Take-home | One pint of strawberry jam |

Running the workshop

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| <p>Setup – before people arrive</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill the canner to the proper level with water and start bringing it to a boil. • Start a small pan of water (2 cups) heating to medium heat for warming the lids. • Have all other canning equipment out: jar lifter, hot pads, spoons, etc. • Have a basin of hot, soapy water ready for washing jars. • Put a number of small saucers or plates in the freezer to chill. |
| <p>Wash and heat jars - as people arrive</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people arrive, have them wash and rinse their jars. • Place the jars into the canner to heat. • Place the lids into the small saucepan to heat (don't boil lids). |
| <p>Introduction (5 minutes)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself • Any group business: next meeting date/topic, how to get on the mailing list, paying for class, etc. |
| <p>Overview</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-sentence overview of what we're doing today: <i>Today we're going to learn about safe canning, then make and can strawberry jam. You'll be prepping your berries while I talk, to save a little time.</i> |
| <p>Start prepping strawberries</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the participants start washing, stemming, and slicing their berries (quarters or eighths) as they come in. They can work while you talk, and this will save some time. • Each person should have 3 cups of sliced berries. It works best if people STOP when they reach 3 cups, rather than just making extra jam. |
| <p>Intro to canning (20-30 minutes)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See the talking points below for key things to mention during your intro. |
| <p>Talk about pectin</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss natural pectin, added pectin, and low-sugar pectin (see talking points) |
| <p>Make jam</p> | <p>You may have to do this in 2 rounds, depending on how many burners you have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put 3 cups of berries, 1 c. of sugar, and 2Tbl lemon juice (to taste) in a very large frying pan. • Bring to a boil – the berries will froth a lot (hence the big pan) • Reduce heat to medium and stir constantly until the jam begins to thicken – usually 15-20 minutes after boiling. |
| <p>Jell test</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a saucer out of the freezer. • Put a dime-sized drop of jam on the plate. • Wait 30 seconds. • Tilt the plate and see how runny the jam is. If it runs only a little, it's jelled enough. If it's still runny, keep cooking the jam. |
| <p>Bottle the jam</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each participant takes a jar out of the canner, dumps the hot water back into the canner (or the sink, if the canner is getting too full), and places the jar next to the stove. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill the jar with her hot jam to ½” below the rim of the jar. • Wipe the rim with a damp cloth and place the lid and band on the jar. • Use the jar tongs to place the jar into the canner. • If she has too much jam, she can take home the extras in a spare jar or give it to someone who needs to “top up” a jar. If you have space in the canner, extras can be canned so long as the jar is full with ½” headspace. • Repeat for each participant. |
| Process the jam | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the canner is full (and hopefully you can get everyone’s jam in in one batch), process for 15 minutes. • After 15 minutes, take the jars out of the canner, allow to cool on a towel, and listen for the PING! |
| Clean up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask everyone who can stay to pitch in, and you’ll be cleaned up in no time. |

Talking points

You may use this as the basis for your introduction or to fill in while nothing interesting is happening on the stove.

I strongly recommend everyone own the Ball Blue Book. It’s about \$6 and worth its weight in home-canned tomatoes! It has great illustrated directions for safe canning, and I refer to it every season to make sure I don’t forget any steps. I also like to show the chart of safe canning temperatures, the temps at which yeast, mold, and bacteria are killed, etc. during workshops. As a facilitator, I often bring copies to workshops and sell them with no markup, just so people can have copies.

Two types of canning: Water bath and pressure canning. Water-bath canning is what we’re doing today. It requires less expensive equipment and is good for jam, fruit, pie filling, pickles, and can be safe for tomatoes and salsa. Pressure canning is the only safe method for canning non-acidic foods like vegetables, meat, and soup stock. Don’t try pressure canning until you are comfortable water-bath canning.

How canned food can go bad: yeast, mold, and bacteria. Yeast causes food to ferment. Mold causes food to get fuzzy. You will see and/or smell both of these and not want to eat the food – just throw it out. The worst that can happen if you do a bad job canning jam, fruit, or pickles is that the food will spoil and you’ll throw it out before you eat it.

Bacteria – specifically botulism – is invisible and odorless and causes paralysis or death, so that’s the one you really need to worry about. Note that if canned goods have botulism, you can’t “fix” it just by heating it to boiling after opening the jar – the only way to be safe is to be very certain about your canning processes.

Preventing botulism: The heat of boiling water will kill yeast and mold, but not botulism. The two things that kill botulism are pressure canning (i.e., temperatures above 220°) and acid.

Luckily, all fruits and jams are acidic enough to kill botulism – so you never have to worry about killing people with homemade jam!

Regarding tomatoes: The acid in tomatoes varies greatly among varieties and even depending on the ripeness of the tomato. They are close enough to the borderline of “safe acidity” that it is standard practice to either add lemon juice to each jar of tomatoes, or to pressure can them as you would non-acid vegetables. Use bottled lemon juice, which is standardized to 5% acidity. Add 2 Tbl per quart or 1 Tbl per pint of tomatoes.

Sterilizing equipment: You don’t need to sterilize jars, lids, or rings, but they do all need to be clean. Jars need to be heated before you put boiling-hot tomatoes in them, or the jars may crack. The easiest way to heat the jars is to put them in the canner as the water in the canner is heating.

Lids (the flat metal disk with the gasket) should be warmed, but not boiled, to make the best seal. Rings can be left cold until you place them on the jar.

Don’t fill jars right to the brim, or they might not seal. Each food needs different “headspace”; this will be listed in the recipe. Tomatoes get 1/2” headspace.

Jars must be covered by 1-2” of water in the canner. Don’t let jars touch the bottom of the canner; use a rack or a bunch of canning rings to keep them off the bottom. Any pot that meets these conditions can be used as a canner – though most soup pots don’t cover jars (especially quarts) by over an inch.

Pectin is a naturally-occurring thickening agent. Different fruits have different amounts of pectin naturally. Strawberries and blueberries have a lot; cherries don’t have much at all. Cooking fruit slowly brings out the pectin and makes the jam “set” or jell.

Powdered pectin was designed to prevent “jam failures” of runny jam. It can be used for freezer jams, which taste fresher because they’re less cooked. However, it requires a very specific balance of fruit, sugar, acid, and pectin – and pectin jams often have more sugar than fruit. Follow the instructions exactly.

There are special “low-sugar” pectins that allow you to use less sugar, or a different type of sweetener such as honey. Again, follow the package directions exactly.

You can double this jam recipe, but don’t triple it – make 2 batches instead. Don’t ever double or triple a recipe using added pectin – it won’t set up.

Tips

- Runny jam is great in yogurt or on ice cream
- Recipe handout for participants is on the next page

Preserving Traditions Recipe: Strawberry Jam

Ingredients (can be doubled, but not tripled unless cooked in batches)

- 3 cups cut-up strawberries (quarters or eighths)
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 Tbl lemon juice (to taste)
- +/- flavorings such as candied ginger

Yield: ~2 half-pints

Equipment

- Water bath canner and rack
- Canning accessories: Jar lifter, funnel, lid lifter
- 2 half-pint jars or one pint jar, with bands and lids
- Small saucepan to warm lids
- Large frying pan
- Knife

The method

- **Clean and cut the berries:** The berries will shrink a bit during cooking, but cut them small enough that you won't have huge chunks of berry in your jam (unless you like it that way).
- **Cook the jam:** Put the berries, sugar, and lemon juice in a large frying pan. Cook everything together in a large pot on medium-high heat. Once it boils vigorously (it'll foam up a lot), start timing.
- **After 10-12 minutes, test the jam for jelling.** You do this by dripping a very small amount of jam (1/4 tsp or so) onto a chilled ceramic plate. Let it sit for 30 seconds, and tilt the plate. When the jam is properly jelled, the drop of jelly will ooze slowly down the plate. If it's runny, you'll need to cook it some more. Turn the heat down to medium and stir constantly. Every few minutes, try the jell test again with a cold plate (keep the plate in the freezer between tests).
- **Can the jam, if desired.** When the jam is sufficiently cooked-down, you can can it in a water bath so you can store it at room temperature. Follow instructions in the Ball Blue Book.
- **Optionally, just pour into jars and put the jars in the fridge.** They'll keep four to six months in the fridge without canning – very nice if you've only made one pint.

