

Jam Session: Easy Tips for Making Homemade Jam

By R. Grimsby

Back in the days when fruit was only available in season and less food was produced during the winter, people had to learn how to preserve nutritious food from the summer harvest to last through the winter.

Nowadays, fruit is available all year round at the supermarket. While you can buy apples and peaches whenever you want, chances are, they will be much more expensive and much less tasty off-season. Take advantage of seasonal peach bushels and spring strawberry picking. You can get delicious fruit for only a few dollars a pound at farmers markets or pick-your-own farms.

Making your own jam is also very affordable. You can buy nice quality organic sugar for only 3 or 4 dollars a bag. This will produce about 6 jars of jam. Homemade jam is extremely economic given the quality of the product.

Making jam is very easy. While it's important to use clean utensils and jars, the added sugar is what really preserves the fruit and keeps it from rotting. Unlike preserves, where the environment must be pristine and the jars carefully sealed, jam allows for greater flexibility. However, the tradeoff is that jam contains more sugar than preserves, which might deter the more health-conscious eater.

To make jam you will need clean jars, volume of sugar to equal fruit, lemon, and a decent pan to boil in.

First, clean the fruit. Remove all fruit that is damaged or looks like it has gone bad. One bad apple can ruin an entire batch of jam.

Depending on the fruit, you may want to peel it. Follow the “when in doubt, throw it out” rule. Apples and peaches are better when peeled, whereas more exotic guava makes an excellent jam with the rind cooked. Chop the fruit into small pieces and place in a pot. For a



drier fruit like apples, you will need to add water to boil in. For peaches and other fruits with high water content, only a little water will suffice.

Add about the same amount of sugar as you have fruit, and add any spices that go nicely with the fruit. For instance, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves are very tasty and cook up excellently with most fruit. Squeeze in the lemon. The chemical pectin in citrus fruit is what adds the “jelly-like” quality. Bring to a boil, and allow to simmer until it is a good consistency. The jam should be relatively thick. It will thicken as it cools.

Now, ready your jars. Jars can be store-bought or recycled as long as you wash them well and they are free of any food odors. Pour boiling water up to the rim and on the caps. Once the jars are clean, spoon the hot jam into the jars and seal the caps on tight.

Unlike making preserves, you will not necessarily need a vacuum seal for the jam, but it certainly extends the shelf life. If you sealed the jar well enough, you may hear a small “pop” as the jar cools and sucks the lid into the concave, vacuum seal.

Label the date on the jar. Homemade jam will have a shelf life of about a year, tends to greatly impress people when given as gifts, and is generally much tastier than store-bought jam.