

Canning Sweet Spreads: Jams, Jellies, Preserves, Conserves, Marmalades and Butters

Sweet spreads are similar in composition but have many different textures, flavors and colors. They are preserved with sugar and then jellied. Fruit, sugar, pectin and acid are the four main ingredients. The different characteristics of these spreads depends on type of fruit used, preparation method, proportions of ingredients and cooking method.



What's what?

Jellies - made by strained juice of a fruit

Jams - made from crushed or ground fruit that is cooked to smooth consistency

Preserves - contains whole fruits or fruit pieces suspended in syrup

Conserves - jam made from mixture of fruit, usually citrus. Often contains nuts and dried fruits

Marmalades - tender jelly with small pieces of fruit or citrus peels.

Butters - fruit pulp cooked with sugar

Jelly Product Tips

1. Measure ingredients carefully.
2. Use exact amount of sugar.
3. Cook one batch at a time.
4. Avoid pureeing fruit if using blender or food processor
5. Avoid squeezing a jelly bag.
6. Follow directions on pectin package.
7. Use large (six to 10 qt.) non-copper saucepan for cooking.
8. Cook as quickly as possible.



Why is the sugar content important to prevent spoilage?

Sugar binds water making it unavailable for pathogenic and spoilage microorganisms to grow.

Importance of Ingredients

Careful combination of fruit, pectin, acid and sugar.

- Fruit - provides the following:
 - flavor and color
 - water to dissolve the ingredients
 - natural pectin and acid
- Pectins - Needed in combination with acid and sugar to form gel.
 - not all fruits have same level of pectin
 - under ripened fruit has more pectin than ripened fruit
- Acid - Needed for gel formation
- Sugar - Flavor, preserving and gelling agent

To prevent spoilage, jars must be processed in a boiling water canner.

Pre-sterilize Jars

(if processed less than 10 minutes in boiling water bath)

- New canning jars are not sterile
- Brand new and re-used jars should always be cleaned prior to use
- Inspect jars for cracks or chips when washing
- To sterilize jars:
 1. Place cleaned jars right-side up on rack in canner.
 2. Fill the jars and canner with water to 1-inch above tops of jars.
 3. Bring water to a boil.
 4. Boil for 10 minutes.
 5. When ready to fill jars, remove and empty the water from the jars.



Yeast and Molds

Yeasts can ferment jams and jellies if:

- Storage area is warm and damp
- Containers are not sterilize.
- Seal is not airtight.
- Too little sugar is used.
- Product is not boiled for the recommended time. The boiling evaporates the water allowing for the proper concentration of sugar.

Mold

- Prevent mold by always use two-piece canning lids, sterilized jars and process according to recipe.



Adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at: nchfp.uga.edu

Storage Q & A

Q: How long is shelf life?

A: All home canned foods should be used within a year.

Q: How long can I keep my jams and jellies after they've been opened?

A: Keep in the refrigerator at 40°F or lower for 3 to 4 weeks.

Freezer Jam

- Prepare jam recipe using pectin specifically designated for freezer jam.
- Pour prepared jam into clean containers, leaving 1/2 inch headspace.
- Place covers and let stand at room temperature until gel sets (may take up to 24 hours).
- Store uncooked jams in the refrigerator up to 3 weeks and up to 1 year in freezer.

