Preservation Begins with Up-to-Date Resources

Answers your food preservation questions!

Talk with experts by calling toll-free 1-800-854-1678 Monday through Friday from 9 am to noon and 1 to 4 pm.

AnswerLine provides research-based answers to your questions. This free service is provided by the University of Minnesota Extension and collaborating partners.

After hours check the website: www.extension.iastate.edu/families/answerline

So Easy to Preserve
“how-to” book with 375 pages of the latest recommendations for safe food preservation from USDA. Over 185 tested recipes as well as information for new and experienced preservers.

To learn more or to order, visit http://setp.uga.edu/.

What about the Ball Blue Book?
The “Blue Book” has been in print since 1909! It is updated with the latest food preservation recommendations and is an economical, handy resource guide for the home preserver.

Complete Book of Home Preserving:
400 Delicious And Creative Recipes for Today – an interesting collection for novices and experienced preservers by the publishers of the Ball Blue Book, follows USDA guidelines.
Jam and Jelly Equipment

Every year manufacturers come out with new products, gadgets, and equipment advertised to save time. If you want to have the latest, it is a good idea to do research to see how the reviews rate the product, if the claims hold water, if this product or gadget will meet your needs and if it contributes to a safe, home-preserved food.

This spring, Jarden Home Brands (makers of Ball® and Kerr® home canning products) introduced the FreshTECH Automatic Jam and Jelly Maker as an electric appliance (approximately $100) designed to make jam or jelly in less than 30 minutes. The machine has 2 settings (jam and jelly/juice) with a nonstick interior and stirring paddle to make cleanup easier. It has a built-in stirring system that consistently stirs the jam, beeps when you need to add sugar and when the jam or jelly is done. Once the jam is done (small batches of four or five half-pint jars), it can be served immediately, processed in a water bath canner or frozen for up to a year.

Water Bath Jams and Jellies

For the highest quality jam and jelly and to prevent mold growth and loss of product, process jam and jelly in a boiling water bath.

Even though sugar acts as a preservative in jam and jelly, molds can still grow. Past methods of sealing jars with wax or inverting—turning a closed, filled jar of hot product on its lid—are not as effective in sealing jars or in preventing spoilage.

What if you find mold in a jar? USDA’s advice for handling moldy jars of jam or jelly is to discard the contents of the whole jar—gone are the days of scraping off the mold!

Low- and No-Sugar Jam and Jelly

Although most jams and jellies are very sweet, there are some excellent low- and no-sugar alternatives. Low- and no-sugar jams and jellies cannot be made by leaving the sugar out of regular recipes. Use one of the following methods to make your low- and no-sugar jellied products:

- Look for packages of pectin products that say “light”, “less sugar” or “no sugar needed” on the label. Specific directions for making these kinds of jams and jellies are in the package insert.

- Using regular pectin and adding an artificial sweetener. You must use a special recipe for this. Regular pectin does contain some sugar so this would not be completely “sugar free.” Check the package instructions.

- Unflavored gelatin can be used as a thickener for jellied products using specific recipes. Artificial sweeteners may be added if you so choose.

- Boiling fruit pulp until the pulp thickens will resemble a jam. You can also add a sugar substitute if you want.

Some no-sugar jellied products need to be processed longer in a boiling water bath and some need to be kept in a refrigerator. Check the recipe.

Low- and no-sugar jams and jellies may look different from those made with sugar but they still have a wonderful flavor.
**Liquid vs. Powder Pectin**

Pectin is a natural plant substance that causes fruit to gel. Some fruits (apples, cranberries, crabapples, currants, and grapes) contain enough natural pectin to form a good gel. Low pectin fruits (strawberries, blueberries, peaches, apricots, cherries, pears, raspberries, and blackberries) need to be combined with high-pectin fruit or with commercial pectin.

Commercial pectin is manufactured from citrus or apple peels and sold as a liquid or powder. Both forms give good results but the methods of adding ingredients differ. Liquid pectin is added to the cooked fruit and sugar mixture immediately after it is removed from the heat. Powdered pectin is added to the unheated crushed fruit.

Some people prefer the convenience of liquid pectin while others prefer powdered pectin because it is less expensive. Liquid and powder pectin cannot be interchanged in a recipe. Be sure to follow the manufacturer’s recipes and instructions.

**First In First Out**

Time to do a freezer inventory? We are always going to remember what the home preserved packages are and when we put them in the freezer! But as we find “mystery” packages of frozen produce, we vow to do better this season with dating and labeling.

Date marking and labeling of packages allows us to practice **First In First Out**, an inventory rotation to ensure quality frozen products. Also, keeping a written freezer inventory is a helpful tool for freezer management. Visit [http://z.umn.edu/zu](http://z.umn.edu/zu) for a Freezer Inventory chart you can use as you begin freezing fruits and vegetables this season.

**Drying Strawberries**

When preserving strawberries, most people freeze them or make strawberry jam but another alternative is drying. Dried strawberries can be eaten as a snack, added to green salads, added to cooked and dried cereals, added to muffins, pancakes or cookie dough, combined with granola, added to smoothies or mixed with ice cream or yogurt.

Select sweet berries that are firm, ripe, and have a good solid color. Wash berries, remove caps and cut into ½-inch slices or cut in half lengthwise. Dry cut-side up. Turning berries over halfway through drying helps prevent sticking. The ideal drying temperature is 130 to 140 degrees. Use a dehydrator or dry in an oven if you are able to set the oven temperature low enough.

Drying time depends on the size of berry pieces, exposure of air to cut surfaces, temperature, air circulation and method of drying. Berries may take 7-15 hours for slices and 24-36 hours for whole berries. Dried strawberries should be pliable and leathery with no bits of moisture.

After drying, cool fruit for 30 minutes and store in an air-tight or vacuum-sealed container. They also keep very well if stored in the freezer.

Another form of dried strawberries is fruit leather. Check National Center for Home Food Preservation for more information: [http://z.umn.edu/leathers](http://z.umn.edu/leathers).
Pickled Asparagus

Pickling isn’t just for cucumbers anymore – pickled asparagus is gaining in popularity!

One of the first crops of the season is asparagus and it is a good candidate for pickling. Use the freshest asparagus for best color. Choose spears with straight, green (possibly tinged with purple) and tightly closed tips. Thinner spears are preferred for pickling. The quality deteriorates very rapidly after it has been harvested, so keep it cool.

For a pickled asparagus recipe visit: http://z.umn.edu/asparagus

Directions are given for preparing in a pint jar or a 12oz jar which is taller than a pint and allows pickling of longer spears.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use old pectin?

It’s best to purchase new regular pectin (powder or liquid) each season because using old pectin can result in a weak gel formation. This is less of a problem with modified and low methoxyl pectin (the type used for no-sugar or low-sugar jams). If you need to save powdered pectin, store it in moisture-vapor-proof containers in the freezer.

What is a jelly bag?

A jelly bag made of firm, unbleached muslin cloth is needed when extracting juice for jelly. The bag, or suitable cloth, should be damp when extracting the juice from fruit.

Does liquid pectin contain sulfite which might cause problems for people with asthma?

Yes. Asthmatics need to be aware that liquid pectin does contain sulfite (check the label) which can produce a severe allergic reaction in some people. If this is a problem, it’s best to use powdered pectin.

Do I need to cook frozen vegetables before using them in a salad or dip?

Yes. According to Barb Ingham, Food Science Professor and Extension Specialist, University of Wisconsin, there have been a few instances when frozen vegetables were recalled due to a contamination of the bacteria, Listeria monocytogenes. If a pregnant woman, newborn, person over 65 years old or person with weakened immune system comes in contact with Listeria, it can make them very sick or it could be fatal. Although the risk is small, when adding frozen vegetables to foods that do not receive additional cooking, it is a good idea to cook the frozen vegetables, cool them and then add them to the salad or dip.

What temperature should the freezer be?

For best quality frozen foods, maintain your freezer at 0°F or below.