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## How to Make Homemade Old-Fashioned Strawberry Jam - Easily!

Making and canning your own old-fashioned strawberry jam without pectin is also easy. I prefer to use pectin (it's natural, made from apples) because it uses less sugar, ensures a good set, and takes much, much less time to cook... BUT... people have asked for the old pre-pectin recipe, so here it is. These directions work equally well for strawberry, raspberry, blackberry, blueberry, boysenberry, dewberry, gooseberry, loganberry, marionberry, peach, plum, damson plum, tayberry, youngberry, etc.; by themselves or mixed berry jam.

For more information about strawberries, see Strawberry Picking Tips (<http://www.pickyourown.org/strawberries.htm>) and miscellaneous strawberry facts (<http://www.pickyourown.org/strawberryfacts.htm>)

### Ingredients

- Strawberries - preferably fresh, but frozen (without syrup) works, too. A batch requires 8 cups of crushed berries, so you'll need about 12 cups of raw whole strawberries.
- Sugar - About 6 cups of dry, granulated (table) sugar. Can you use honey instead? Yes, the same amount of honey can be used in place of sugar, but it probably won't give you a good set. It still takes great, though. And for the [no-sugar recipe, click here](#)

### Yield

About eight 8-ounce jars

## 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 stainless steel pots.
- Large spoons and ladles
- 1 Canner (a huge pot to sterilize 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) \$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.

### 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 sterilize them. (\$2 at big box stores or it comes in the kit at left)
- 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:



## Strawberry Jam-making Directions

This example shows you how to make either Strawberry jam or Strawberry - Raspberry - Blackberry Jam - also called Triple Berry Jam (my favorite, and everyone I give a jar to, says it has become their favorite, too!) But you can use this recipe to make any type of jam; where there is a difference, I will point it out! The yield from this recipe is about 8 eight-ounce jars (which is the same as 4 pints).

### Step 1 - Pick the berries! (or buy them already picked)

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality ones! See this page for [strawberry facts and picking tips](#)

At right is a picture of a typical strawberry field.

I prefer to grow my own; which is really easy - but that does take some space and time and can be challenging.



As mentioned in the ingredients section; you may use frozen berries (those without syrup or added sugar); which is especially useful if you want to make some strawberry jam in December to give away at Christmas!

Above and at left are strawberries and blackberries that I picked at a pick-your-own farm. If you want to pick your own, here is a list and links to the [pick your own farms](#).

## How much fruit?

Strawberry Jam can ONLY be made in rather small batches - about 6 cups at a time - like the directions on the pectin say, DO NOT increase the recipes or the jam won't "set" (jell, thicken). (WHY? Alton Brown on the Food Channel says pectin can overcook easily and lose its thickening properties. It is easier and faster to get an even heat distribution in smaller batches. It takes about 8 cups of raw, mashed berries per batch. For triple berry jam, I use 4 cups of mashed (slightly crushed) strawberries, 2 cups of raspberries and 2 cups of blackberries. For strawberry-only jam; you'll need 8 cups of mashed strawberries.

## Step 2 - 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 "sterilize" cycle, the water bath processing will sterilize them as well as the contents! If you don't have a dishwasher with a sterilize cycle, you can wash the containers in hot, soapy water and rinse, then sterilize the jars by boiling them 10 minutes, and keep the jars in hot water until

they are used.

NOTE: If unsterilized 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 sterilize 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 jam.

### Step 3 - Wash and hull the fruit!

I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the fruit in plain cold water.

With strawberries you must remove the hulls. With other berries, just pick off any stems and leaves.



### Step 4 - Crush the fruit

Then you just mash them up a bit - not completely crushed, but mostly. Most people seem to like large chunks of fruit but crushing them releases the natural pectin so it can thicken. You'll need about 6 cups, mushed up.



If you want seedless jam, you may need to run the crushed berries through a food mill (below). The Villaware has a selection of screens, including a fine screen that works on strawberries. The Foley stops blackberries seeds, but most raspberry, and all strawberry seeds pass through. They cost between \$25 to \$60.



## Step 5 - Measure out the sugar, honey or other sweetener.

You'll need 6 cups of sugar (or about the same of honey).

You can make a strawberry jam with no added sugar if you use the "No-added sugar pectin" but honestly, the resultant jam just isn't as good. It tends to be darker, more runny and less flavorful. If you would rather try to make [jam with no added sugar, click here](#) for those directions! But using the no-added sugar pectin with a reduced amount of sugar, about 4 cups instead of the usual 6 cups, works GREAT! [See this page for the recipe for jam using pectin.](#)

## Step 6 - Get the lids warming in hot (but not boiling) water



Lids: put the lids into a pan of hot water for at least several minutes; to soften up the gummed surface and clean the lids.

## Step 7 - Mix the berries and sugar; bring slowly to a full boil



Combine the berries and sugar (or honey). Bring slowly to a boil, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves.

Why use pectin? I'll put in a plug for pectin here: You may run into grandmotherly types who sniff "I never used pectin!" at you. Well, sure, and their generation took a horse and buggy to work, died of smallpox and ate canned meat and green beans that tastes

like wet newspapers. Old fashioned ways are not always better nor healthier. Pectin, which occurs naturally in fruit, is what makes the jam "set" or thicken (together with sugars and acids in the fruit). The pectin you buy is just natural apple pectin, more concentrated. Using pectin dramatically reduces the cooking time, which helps to preserve the vitamins and flavor of the fruit, and uses much less added sugar. Having said that, there are some fruits that have naturally high amounts of pectin ([see this page for a list](#)) and they simply don't need much or any padded pectin.

### Step 8 - Boil to a gel

Once sugar is dissolved, cook rapidly to , or almost to, the [jellying point](#), depending upon whether a firm or soft jam is desired. See step 9 for determining if you have a gel or "set". As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking.



Remove from the heat.

### Step 9 - 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 jam is ready. If not, I mix in a little more sugar (about 1 cup) and 2 tablespoons of lemon juice and bring it to a boil again for 1 or 2 minutes.



Notes about "set" (thickening or jell): It takes 3 ingredients for jams and jellies to set: pectin, sugar and acidity. The

amount of pectin that is naturally occurring in the fruit varies from one type of fruit to another and by ripeness (counter intuitively, unripe contains more pectin). See this page (<http://www.pickyourown.org/pectin.htm>) for more about pectin in fruit. It takes the right balance, and sufficient amounts of each of pectin, sugar and acidity to result in a firm jam or jelly. Lastly, it takes a brief period (1 minute) of a hard boil, to provide enough heat to bring the three together. Generally speaking, if your jam doesn't firm up, you were short in pectin, sugar or acidity or didn't get a hard boil. That's ok - you can "remake" the jam; see this page: ([http://www.pickyourown.org/how\\_to\\_fix\\_runny\\_jam.htm](http://www.pickyourown.org/how_to_fix_runny_jam.htm))

## Step 10 - Skim any excessive foam

Foam... What is it? Just jam with a lot of air from the boiling. But it tastes more like, well, foam, than jam, so most people remove it. It is harmless, though. Some people add 1 teaspoon of butter or margarine to the mix in step 6 to reduce foaming, but food experts debate whether that may contribute to earlier spoilage, so I usually omit it and skim.



But save the skimmed foam! You can recover jam from it to use fresh! [See this page for directions!](#)



## Step 11 - Optional: Let stand for 5 minutes and stir completely.

Why? Otherwise, the fruit will often float to the top of the jar. This isn't a particular problem; you can always stir the jars later when you open them; but some people get fussy about everything being "just so", so I've included this step! Skipping this step won't affect the quality of the jam at all. I usually don't bother. You'll also notice that the less sugar you use, the more the fruit will float (chemists will tell you it is due to the decreased density of the solution!)

## Step 12 - Fill the jars and put the lid and rings on

Fill them to within ¼-inch of the top, wipe any spilled jam 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 come in really handy!



## Step 13 - 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 10 minutes, which is what SureJell (the makers of the pectin) recommend. 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 sterilize 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 5 minutes, and the last jars were probably in for 10. I rarely have a jar spoil, so it must work. But you don't want to process them too long, or the jam will turn dark and get runny. See the chart below for altitude adjustment to processing times, if you are not in the sea level to 1,000ft above sea level range.

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 jam and then not to process the jars to be sure they don't spoil!

Recommended process time for jams in a boiling water canner.				
		Process Time at Altitudes of		
Style of Pack	Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Half-pints or Pints	5 min	10	15

### Step 14 - Remove and cool the jars - Done!



Lift the jars out of the water with your jar lifter tongs 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! Another trick is to keep the uncooked berries or other fruit in the freezer and make and can the jam as needed, so it's always fresh.

## Answers to Common Questions

- Why should cooked jelly be made in small batches?  
If a larger quantity of juice is used, it will be necessary to boil it longer thus causing loss of flavor, darkening of jelly, and toughening of jelly. It really doesn't work. Trust me; I've tried many times!
- Can I use frozen berries instead of fresh?  
Yep! Raspberries can be particularly hard to find fresh and are expensive! Frozen berries work just fine, and measure the same. Just be sure to get the loose, frozen whole fruit; not those that have been mushed up or frozen in a sugar syrup!
- Should jelly be boiled slowly or rapidly?  
It should be boiled rapidly since long, slow boiling destroys the pectin in the fruit juice.
- What do I do if there's mold on my jellied fruit product?  
Discard jams and jellies with mold on them. The mold could be producing a mycotoxin (poisonous substance that can make you sick). USDA and microbiologists recommend against scooping out the mold and using the remaining jam or jelly.
- Why did my jellied fruit product ferment, and what do I do?  
Jellied fruit products may ferment because of yeast growth. This can occur if the product is improperly processed and sealed, or if the sugar content is low. Fermented fruit products have a disagreeable taste. Discard them.

- What happens if my jam or jelly doesn't gel?  
Remaking cooked runny jam or jelly instructions can be found on this page :  
[http://www.pickyourown.org/how\\_to\\_fix\\_runny\\_jam.htm](http://www.pickyourown.org/how_to_fix_runny_jam.htm)

## Summary - Cost of Making Homemade Strawberry Jam - makes 8 jars, 8 oz each\*\*

Item	Quantity	Cost in 2009	Source	Subtotal
fresh whole berries (strawberries)	12 cups	\$9.00/gallon	Pick your own	\$13.50
Canning jars (8 oz size), includes lids and rings	8 jars	\$7.50/dozen Lids alone are about \$1.25 per dozen	Grocery stores, like Public, Kroger, Safeway and sometimes, Big Lots, local hardware stores and big box stores	\$5.00
Sweetener - see step 4	6 cups	\$2.50	Grocery stores, like Public, Kroger, Safeway and sometimes, Big Lots, local hardware stores and big box stores	\$2.50
Total				\$21.00 total or about \$2.63 per jar (if you already have the jars, and just need new lids for a total of: \$2.10 per jar

\* - This assumes you already have the pots, pans, ladles, and reusable equipment. Note that you can reuse the jars! Many products are sold in jars that will take the lids and rings for canning. Some authorities do not recommend these, saying they are more prone to break, and while I have found that is true of mayonnaise jars, I have found the Classico spaghetti jars to be pretty sturdy.