

# PRESERVE IT FRESH, PRESERVE IT SAFE CHERRIES



When preserving fresh foods at home, follow proper techniques to prevent foodborne illness. These tested methods can be used to process sweet or sour cherries.

## Quality

Select freshly harvested cherries with a deep uniform color and ideal maturity for eating fresh. Do not delay processing.

## Preparation

Stem and wash cherries. Pit if desired. Immediately place pitted cherries into cold water. Add 1 teaspoon of powdered ascorbic acid or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets per gallon to prevent stem-end discoloration. Be sure to crush the vitamin C tablets. For unpitted cherries, prick skin on both sides with a clean needle to prevent splitting.

## Freezing

Freezer manuals offer guidelines for the maximum amount that can be frozen at one time to maintain quality — usually 2 to 3 pounds of food for each cubic foot of freezer space.

Cherries can be packed with syrup, dry sugar, or left unsweetened.

*To make a syrup pack:* Mix and dissolve 4 cups of sugar in 4 cups of lukewarm water for sour cherries; or mix 2¾ cups of sugar in 4 cups of lukewarm water for sweet cherries. Add 1 cup of syrup to each quart of prepared cherries. Add ½ teaspoon ascorbic acid for better quality.

*For a sugar pack:* Mix ¾ cup of dry sugar per quart (1½ pounds) of sour cherries.

*For unsweetened pack:* Spread cherries on a baking sheet. Freeze until firm. Package, seal, and freeze.

To package, fill pint- or quart-sized freezer bags 3 to 4 inches from the top. Squeeze out air, leave 1-inch head space, seal, label, and freeze. Before freezing, bags may be inserted into reusable, rigid-plastic freezer containers for added protection against leakage.

## Canning

To learn more about canning, see *How-to Guide to Water Bath Canning and Steam Canning* (MF3241) and *How-to Guide to Pressure Canning* (MF3242).

Wash and sterilize jars. Keep them hot. Preheating is optional for standard metal lids. Heat in simmering but not boiling water if desired. If using reusable plastic lids with rubber rings, follow the manufacturer's instructions.

## Quantity

A lug weighs 25 pounds and yields 8 to 12 quarts. An average of 17½ pounds makes a 7-quart canner load; 11 pounds makes 9 pints. An average of 1¾ pounds makes 1 pint of frozen cherries.

Cherries can be covered with water, apple juice, white grape juice, but light or medium syrup is more common. Medium syrup is suggested for sour cherries and a light syrup for sweet cherries. To make a light syrup for a canner load of quarts, mix 1¼ cups of sugar in 10½ cups of water and heat to dissolve. For medium syrup, mix 3¾ cups sugar and 8¼ cups water and heat to dissolve.

*Hot pack:* Place drained cherries in boiling syrup, juice, or water and bring to a boil. Use a ½ cup of liquid for each quart of drained cherries. Fill clean jars with hot cherries and cooking liquid, leaving ½-inch head space.

*Raw pack:* Fill jars with drained cherries and cover with your choice of boiling liquid, leaving ½-inch head space.

Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace. Wipe jar rims with a clean, damp paper towel. Apply lids and rings fingertip-tight. Process in a water-bath, steam, or pressure canner according to recommendations in Table 1 and Table 2. When processing is complete, turn off heat, and remove lid from water-bath or steam canner. If pressure canning, let the canner depressurize naturally before removing the lid. Let jars cool 5 minutes. Remove jars from canner. Do not

retighten bands. Cool completely, check seals, label, and store.

## Cherry Pie Filling

This fruit filling is an excellent and safe product. Each canned quart makes one 8-inch to 9-inch pie. Fillings may be used as toppings on desserts or pastries.

Clear Jel® is a starch modified to produce excellent sauce consistency even after fillings are canned and baked. **Do not use Instant Clear Jel®.** Other cooking starches are not recommended as they break down, causing a runny sauce consistency when they are used in pie fillings. Clear Jel® is available in bulk food stores or on the Internet.

Because fruit variety may alter the flavor of the pie, make a single quart and a pie. Serve it, and then adjust sugar and spices to suit your taste. Do not alter the amount of lemon juice, which ensures the safety and storage stability of the fillings. If filling is too tart, add more sugar to taste.

When using frozen cherries, select unsweetened fruit. If sugar has been added, rinse fruit while it is frozen. Collect and measure juice from thawing fruit, reserving it for a portion of the water called for in the recipe. Add ¼ cup Clear Jel® per quart, or 1¾ cups for 7 quarts.

### Ingredients

Ingredient	Quantities of ingredients needed for:	
	1 quart filling	7 quarts filling
Fresh or thawed sour cherries	3½ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear Jel	¼ cup + 1 tbsp.	1¾ cups
Cold water	1½ cups	9½ cups
Bottled lemon juice	1 tbsp. + 1 tsp.	½ cup
Cinnamon (optional)	⅛ tsp.	1 tsp.
Almond extract (optional)	¼ tsp.	2 tsp.
Red food coloring (optional)	6 drops	¼ tsp.

### Quality

Select very ripe, firm, tart cherries.

### Procedure

Rinse and pit cherries, and hold in cold water. To prevent stem-end browning, hold pitted cherries in water containing 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals,

or crush six 500-mg vitamin C tablets in 1 gallon of water.

Blanch fresh cherries by placing 6 cups at a time in 1 gallon of boiling water. Boil each batch 1 minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain, but keep the heated fruit in a covered bowl or pot. Combine sugar and Clear Jel® in a large saucepan. Add water and, if desired, the cinnamon, food coloring, and almond extract. Stir mixture and cook over medium-high heat until the mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained cherries; fill jars immediately, leaving 1-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims. Apply lids and rings fingertip-tight.

Process in a boiling water canner according to processing recommendations in Table 1. Turn off heat and remove canner lid. Let jars cool 5 minutes. Remove jars from canner; do not retighten bands. Cool completely, check seals, label and store.

## Sour Cherry Jelly

*Yield:* About 8 half-pints

3 cups prepared juice (about 3 pounds and ½ cup water)

7 cups sugar

2 3-oz. pouches liquid pectin

Sort, wash, and remove stems of fully ripe cherries. Crush cherries. Add ½ cup water; simmer 10 minutes, covered, stirring occasionally. Place prepared fruit in dampened jelly bag or several layers of dampened cheesecloth. Let juice drip, undisturbed, for at least 2 hours or overnight. *Note:* Squeezing the jelly bag may cause jelly to be cloudy. Measure juice and ingredients. For juice, add water to fruit pulp and extract. Combine juice and sugar in a 6- or 8-quart saucepan. Bring mixture to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down, over high heat, stirring frequently. Add liquid pectin, immediately squeezing entire contents from pouches. Continue hard boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim foam if necessary. Ladle hot jelly into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe rims of jars with a clean paper towel. Apply lids and rings fingertip-tight. Process in a boiling water canner or steam canner according to recommendations in Table 1. Turn off heat and remove lid from canner. Let jars cool for

5 minutes. Remove from canner; do not retighten bands. Cool completely, check seals, label, and store.

## Cherry Jam

*Yield:* 8 half-pints

- 1 quart chopped and pitted sweet or sour cherries
- 6¼ cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (use only with sweet cherries)
- 2 3-oz. pouches liquid pectin

Combine cherries, sugar, and lemon juice (if needed) in a large saucepot. Bring to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Stir in liquid pectin. Return to a rolling boil. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim foam if necessary. Ladle hot jam into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Apply lids and rings and adjust until fingertip tight. Process in a water-bath or steam canner according to directions in Table 1. Turn off heat and remove canner lid. Let jars cool for 5 minutes. Remove jars from canner. Cool completely. Do not retighten bands because this may

interfere with the sealing process. After cooling, test lids by pressing the center of each one. If the lid does not flex up and down, it is sealed. If it did not seal, place jelly in the refrigerator immediately. Store for up to three weeks or reprocess with a new lid for the full amount of time.

## Problems and Solutions

### 1. How can I reduce the amount of foaming in jam or jelly?

Add ½ teaspoon butter or margarine to the fruit mixture before boiling.

### 2. Is paraffin wax still safe to use on top of jams and jellies?

Because of possible mold contamination, paraffin or wax seals are no longer recommended for any type of sweet spread, including jams and jellies. Always process sweet spreads in a water bath canner or steam canner to prevent mold and preserve flavor and color.

**Table 1. Recommended processing times for cherries in a water-bath canner or steam canner**

Product	Style of Pack	Jar Size	Minutes of processing at different altitudes (in ft.)		
			0-1,000	1,001-3,000	3,001-6,000
Cherries	Hot	Pints	15	20	20
		Quarts	20	25	30
Cherries	Raw	Pints or Quarts	25	30	35
Cherry pie filling	Hot	Pints or Quarts	30	35	40
Sour cherry jelly	Hot	Half Pints	5	10	15
Cherry jam	Hot	Half Pints	15	20	25

**Table 2. Recommended processing times for cherries in a pressure canner**

Style of pack	Jar Size	Process Time (min.)	Canner gauge pressure for different altitudes (in feet)			
			Dial gauge (lbs.)		Weighted gauge (lbs.)	
			0- 2,000	2,001-4,000	0-1,000	Above 1,000
Hot	Pints	8	6	7	5	10
	Quarts	10	6	7	5	10
Raw	Pints or quarts	10	6	7	5	10

## Nutritional Analysis for Cherries

	Calories	Carbohydrate (g)	Fat (g)	Vit. C (mg)	Dietary Fiber (g)	Sodium (mg)
<b>Cherries (½ cup)</b>						
Water	102.0	24.0	1.4	10.0	1.6	0.0
Apple juice	125.0	29.0	1.4	10.0	1.6	1.5
Light syrup	119.0	28.0	1.4	10.0	1.6	0.0
Medium syrup	154.0	37.0	1.4	10.0	1.6	0.0
<b>Cherry pie filling (½ cup)</b>	150.0	39.0	0.2	8.0	6.5	15.0
⅓ double-crust pie	361.0	58.0	14.0	8.0	7.0	231.0
<b>Sour cherry jelly (1 tbsp.)</b>	29.9	7.8	0.0	0.25	0.1	1.8
<b>Cherry jam (1 tbsp.)</b>	44.0	11.4	0.0	0.1	0.1	1.0

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*Adapted from original by Karen P. Penner, Ph.D., and Jeanne Dray, April 1995*

*Complete Guide to Home Canning, USDA AIB No. 539, 2009; and So Easy to Preserve, 6th ed., The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service.*

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