

Making perfect jams and marmalades

This checklist will help to ensure success every time:

1. Always use fresh, dry, slightly underripe fruit. Prepare and pick over according to type; i.e., hull strawberries, pit plums, top and tail gooseberries, shred citrus peel. Wash the fruit only if necessary and dry it well.
2. Simmer the fruit gently in a large, uncovered pan before adding the sugar. This softens the fruit and helps draw out the pectin. Soft fruits, such as raspberries and strawberries, will not need added water, but tougher-skinned or semihard fruits, such as currants, gooseberries, plums, apples, and citrus fruit, will.
3. Make sure that the fruit skins are well softened before sugar is added. Once the sugar is in, the skins will not soften further, no matter how long you cook them. Citrus peel for marmalade takes 1½ to 2 hours to soften.
4. Adding a little butter or cooking oil (2 teaspoons per pound of fruit) at the same time as the sugar helps prevent any scum from forming.
5. After adding the sugar to the fruit or juice, stir it over gentle heat to ensure it is completely dissolved before the mixture begins to boil. Adding the sugar before the jam boils helps to hold the fruit in whole or chunky pieces. Warming the sugar in a low oven will speed up the dissolving process but is not strictly necessary.
6. Once the sugar is dissolved, cook the jam, without stirring, at a full rolling boil, i.e., when the surface is covered by a mass of foamy bubbles that don't recede when stirred. Time your cooking from the point at which the rolling boil begins. Don't stir at this stage — it cools the jam, so it would take longer to reach the setting point.
7. Test for the setting point, using one of the methods given on p. 41, when the foamy bubbles have subsided and the surface of the boiling jam appears glossy and heavy.
8. When the setting point is reached, remove the pan from the heat. To remove scum, stir the jam (always in the same direction so as not to introduce too much air) until it has dispersed. Alternatively, skim off scum with a slotted spoon. (Scum, by the way, is nothing to worry about — it's just air bubbles created by the intense cooking process.)
9. Allow jams with large pieces of fruit and thick-cut marmalades to cool for 10 to 12 minutes before potting. This allows the mixture to thicken slightly so that the fruit, when potted, should remain well distributed throughout the jar.
10. Pour into clean, sterilized jars (see p. 21) while the preserves are still very hot (always above 185°F). Seal with suitable lids and, once cool, store in a cool, dry place.

Making perfect jellies

You will need to prepare the fruit in the same way as for jams (see left), but there are different watchpoints for jelly making:

1. Soften the fruit by simmering it very gently for 45 to 60 minutes. With juicy fruits, like strawberries, raspberries, red currants, and blackberries, allow ½ to ¾ cup of water per pound of fruit. For plums, allow 1 cup per pound, and for black currants 1½ cups per pound. Apples, quince, and hard fruits should be just covered with water.
2. Strain the cooked fruit pulp through a jelly strainer bag (see p. 33) for at least 2 hours or overnight; this helps make the jelly clear.
3. If you can't resist squeezing or poking the bag to extract more juice, be prepared for your jelly to be cloudy.
4. Allow 1 pound of sugar for every 3 cups of juice. Bring the juice slowly to a boil and add the sugar only when boiling. This helps to keep your jelly clear and bright; the longer the sugar is cooked, the more the jelly will darken. Boiling time will be somewhere between 5 and 15 minutes, depending on the type of fruit used.
5. Test for the setting point in the same way as for jam (see p. 41).
6. Skim the jelly and pour into jars as quickly as possible.



Red currant jelly

Season: June to mid-July

Red currants make a superb and very versatile jelly. The red currant season is short, just a few weeks in midsummer, so make sure you don't miss it. If you haven't time to make your jelly straight away, you can pick the currants and freeze for later.

This is an endlessly useful jelly. A classic condiment to accompany roast lamb or game, it can also be used to enhance the flavor of gravies, casseroles, and piquant sauces. It makes an excellent glaze for fresh fruit tarts too.

Makes three to four 8-ounce jars

2¹/₄ pounds red currants

Granulated sugar

You don't have to top and tail the currants, or even take them off their stems. Simply wash them, put into a preserving pan with 1³/₄ cups of water, then simmer until they are very soft and have released all their juice. This will take about 45 minutes. Strain through a jelly strainer bag or cheesecloth (see p. 33) for several hours or overnight. Do not poke, squeeze, or force the pulp through the bag or you'll get cloudy jelly.

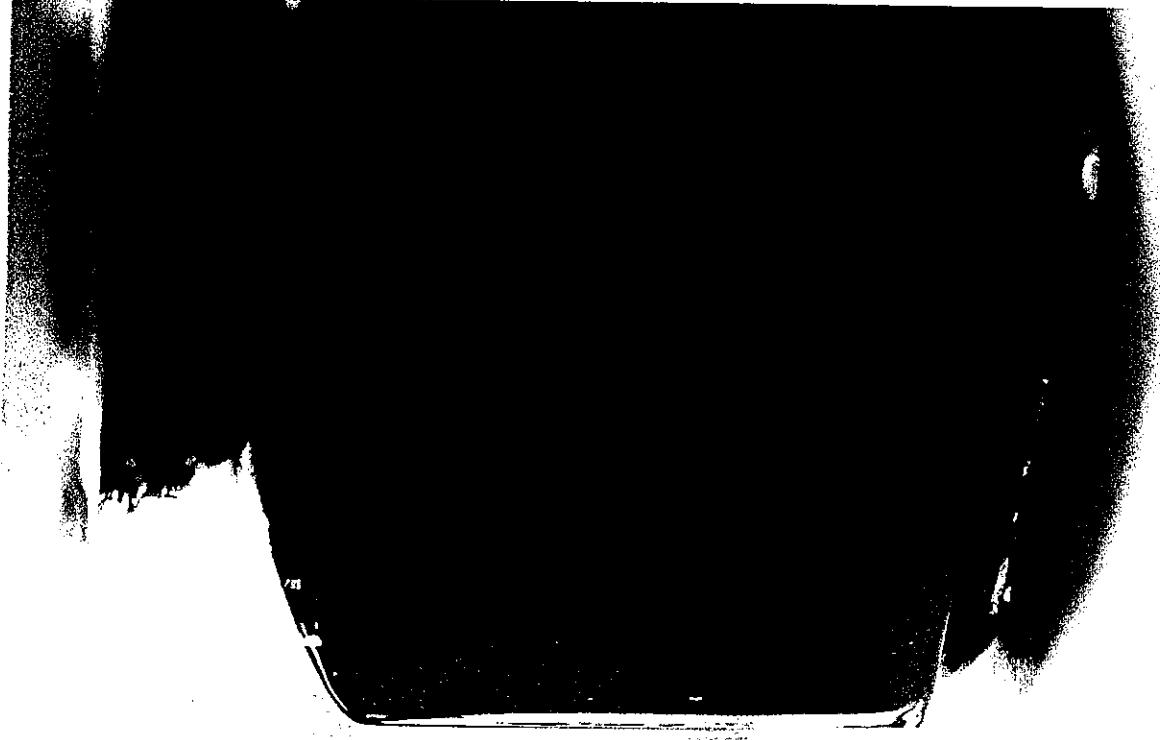
Measure the juice, put it into the cleaned preserving pan, and bring to a boil. For every cup of juice add 1 cup of sugar, adding it only when the juice is boiling. Stir until the sugar has dissolved, ensuring the sides of the pan are free of undissolved sugar crystals. Then boil rapidly for about 8 minutes, or until the setting point is reached (see p. 41).

Remove from the heat and stir to disperse any scum, then pour into warm, sterilized jars and seal (see pp. 21–22). Tap the jars to disperse any air bubbles caught in the jelly. Use within 1 year.

Variation

Add a couple of tablespoonfuls of chopped fresh mint to the jelly for the last 2 to 3 minutes of boiling.

P.S. Red currant jelly is the core ingredient of Cumberland sauce, a traditional partner to baked ham and game. Just add ¹/₄ cup of port, the grated zest of 1 orange and 1 unwaxed lemon, 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, a pinch or two of English mustard powder (see p. 202), and perhaps a pinch of ground ginger to 10 tablespoons of red currant jelly.



Apple, herb, and flower jellies

Season: late summer to autumn

The aromatic essences of fresh herbs and flowers can be captured beautifully in a jelly. These preserves are great to have in the kitchen, as they add a sweet piquancy to all kinds of food, simple and rich. Cooking apples and crab apples are both ideal choices for the basic jelly. Excellent sources of pectin and acid, they nevertheless have gentle flavors that will not overwhelm the herbs.

Serve mint jelly with lamb, sage with fish, basil with poultry or game, parsley with ham, and rose-petal jelly (see below) with wafer-thin, buttered bread. Any herb jelly will also be delicious with soft cheeses, pâtés, and terrines.

Makes four to five 8-ounce jars

3 pounds, 6 ounces cooking apples 7 tablespoons cider vinegar
1 medium bunch of sage, rosemary, Granulated sugar
mint, tarragon, thyme, or basil

Coarsely chop the apples, discarding any bad parts, but don't peel or core them. Place in a preserving pan with the herbs, reserving half a dozen small sprigs to put into the jars. Barely cover the apples with water. Bring to a boil, then simmer gently, covered, for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the fruit is very soft. Pour the contents of the pan into a jelly strainer bag or piece of cheesecloth suspended over a bowl (see p. 33) and leave to drip for at least 2 hours, or overnight.

Measure the strained juice. For every cup of juice, measure out 1 cup of sugar. Return the juice to the cleaned-out pan and add the vinegar. Heat to a boil, then add the sugar and stir until dissolved. Increase the heat and boil rapidly for 10 to 12 minutes, until the setting point is reached (see p. 41). Remove from the heat and skim with a slotted spoon to remove any scum.

Pour into small, warm, sterilized jars (see p. 21), adding an herb sprig to each. Cover and seal (see p. 22). Use within 1 year.

Variations

For stronger-flavored jellies, you can add 3 to 4 tablespoons of freshly chopped herbs after removing the jelly from the heat. Allow to cool for 10 minutes before potting. For exquisite rose-petal or dandelion jelly, add 1 ounce of scented petals instead of herbs. The above method can also be used to make quince jelly, replacing the apples with quince and leaving out the herbs.



Quince cheese

Season: late September to October

A fruit cheese is simply a solid, sliceable preserve — and the princely quince, with its exquisite scent and delicately grainy texture, makes the most majestic one of all. It can be potted in small molds to turn out, slice, and eat with cheese. Alternatively, you can pour it into shallow trays to set, then cut it into cubes, coat with sugar, and serve as a sweetmeat.

A little coarsely chopped quince cheese adds a delicious fruity note to lamb stews or tagines — or try combining it with chopped apple for a pie or crumble.

Makes about 2 1/4 pounds

2 1/4 pounds quince

2 1/2 to 3 3/4 cups granulated sugar

Food-grade paraffin wax, for sealing

Wash the quince. Coarsely chop the fruit but don't peel or core it. Place in a large pan and barely cover with water. Bring to a simmer and cook until soft and pulpy, adding a little more water if necessary. Let stand for several hours.

Press the contents of the pan through a sieve or run through a food mill. Weigh the pulp and return it to the cleaned-out pan, adding an equal weight of sugar. Bring gently to a boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved, then simmer gently, stirring frequently, for an hour and a bit until really thick and glossy. It may bubble and spit like a volcano, so do take care. The mixture is ready when it is so thick that you can scrape a spoon through it and see the bottom of the pan for a couple of seconds before the mixture oozes together again.

If you're using small dishes or straight-sided jars, brush them with a little glycerine. This will make it easy to turn out the cheese. If you're using a shallow baking pan or something similar, line it with parchment or waxed paper, allowing plenty of overhang to wrap the finished cheese.

When the cheese is cooked, pour it into the prepared molds or jars. To seal open molds, pour melted food-grade paraffin wax over the hot fruit cheese. Jars can be sealed with lids (see pp. 21–22). Cheese set in a shallow tray should be covered with parchment or waxed paper and kept in the fridge.

For optimum flavor, allow the quince cheese to mature for 4 to 6 weeks. Use within 1 year.



Cider apple butter

Season: September to November

Autumn is the season for apples. For centuries, the apple crop has been important, and the apple tree cherished and celebrated for its fruit. Wassailing is an English West Country tradition when, on Twelfth Night of old (January 17), country folk toast and drink to the health of the largest and most prolific apple tree in the orchard for a healthy, fruitful crop the coming season.

The sharp and bittersweet qualities of cider give this old-fashioned apple butter a special flavor. It's a sensational fruity spread to daub over hot buttered toast or crumpets.

Makes four to five 8-ounce jars

3 pounds, 6 ounces cooking apples ½ teaspoon ground cloves
2½ cups dry or medium cider ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
Granulated sugar

There is no need to peel or core the apples. However, if you are using windfalls (and this is a very good recipe in which to do so), cut away any damaged or bruised bits. Chop the apples into fairly big pieces (each into about 8). Place in a large pan with the cider and 2½ cups of water. Cook gently until soft, then remove from the heat.

Push the apple mixture through a sieve or use a food mill to reduce it to a purée. Measure the volume of fruit pulp and return it to the cleaned-out pan, adding ¾ cup of sugar for every cup of fruit pulp. Add the cloves and cinnamon. Slowly bring to a boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved, then boil rapidly for 10 to 15 minutes, until the mixture begins to splutter and is thick and creamy.

Remove from the heat and pour immediately into warm, sterilized jars (it's best to use small jars, as this low-sugar preserve has a relatively short shelf life once opened), then seal immediately (see pp. 21–22). Use within 1 year. Store in the fridge once opened.

Variation

Blackberries make a beautiful fruit butter. Follow the above method using 2¼ pounds of ripe blackberries, 1 pound, 2 ounces of cored and peeled cooking apples, and 7 tablespoons of lemon juice; use ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon of sugar for every cup of fruit pulp.

Compost heap jelly

Season: anytime

This is a wonderful, frugal recipe that complements some of the other fruity preserves in the book because it uses the apple scraps and citrus skins that would normally be destined for the compost heap or bin. These skins are full of flavor and rich in pectin, so it's a shame not to use them. For the cost of a bag of sugar (and a bit of your time), you can transform them into a really fruity, marmalade-flavored jelly. It functions nicely as an emergency breakfast preserve when your last jar of marmalade has been eaten and the seasonal Sevilles haven't yet arrived in the shops.

Makes about five 4-ounce jars

1 pound, 2 ounces apple cores and peel Granulated sugar
1 pound, 2 ounces citrus fruit peel Juice of 1 orange, lemon, or grapefruit
(unwaxed lemon, orange, grapefruit (optional)
and/or lime), cut into about
¾-inch shreds

Put the apple cores and peel and the citrus peel into a saucepan. Add sufficient water to cover (you'll probably need about 6 cups). Bring to a simmer and cook slowly for 45 to 60 minutes — this softens the fruit and releases the valuable pectin. Turn the fruit into a jelly strainer bag or piece of cheesecloth (see p. 33) and leave overnight to drip.

Measure the strained liquid and allow 1 cup of sugar for every cup of juice. Return the juice to the pan and add the orange, lemon, or grapefruit juice, if using. Bring to a boil, then add the sugar. Stir until dissolved, then boil rapidly, without stirring, until the setting point is reached (see p. 41), about 10 minutes or so.

Remove from the heat and stir, always going in the same direction, until all the surface bubbles have disappeared. Pour into warm, sterilized jars (see p. 21) and either swivel or tap the side of the jars to remove any remaining bubbles. Seal in the usual way (see p. 22). Use within 1 year.

Seasonal chutney

Season: June to October

This is essentially Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's classic Gkutney, or River Cottage chutney, which first appeared in *The River Cottage Cookbook*. The fruit and vegetable chopping is time-consuming, but important. Whizzing everything up in a food processor would give a very different, sloppy-textured result.

Makes twelve to thirteen 8-ounce jars

- For the spice bag
- 2 ounces fresh ginger, bruised
 - 12 cloves
 - 2 teaspoons black peppercorns
 - 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
 - 2 1/4 pounds summer squash, peeled (if need be) and diced
 - 2 1/4 pounds green tomatoes or tomatillos, peeled and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces cooking apples, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces onions, peeled and diced
 - 3 cups golden raisins
 - 2 1/2 cups light brown sugar
 - 2 1/2 cups cider vinegar or white wine vinegar
 - 2 teaspoons dried chile flakes (optional)
 - Pinch of salt

Make your spice bag by tying up the spices in an 8-inch square of cheesecloth. Put this into a preserving pan with all the other ingredients and bring slowly to a boil, stirring occasionally. This will take awhile, as there will be lots in the pan, but don't hurry it.

Let the mixture simmer, uncovered, for 2 1/2 to 3 hours — maybe even a bit more. You do not have to hover, hawk-eyed, over the pan, but do keep an eye on it and stir regularly to ensure it doesn't burn. It's ready when it is glossy, thick, rich in color and well reduced — but with the chunks of fruit and vegetables still clearly discernible. It is thick enough if, when you draw a wooden spoon through it, the chutney parts to reveal the bottom of the pan for a few seconds.

Pot the chutney while warm in sterilized jars (see p. 21). Pack down with the back of a spoon to remove any air pockets. Seal with vinegar-proof lids (see p. 22). Store in a cool, dark place for a couple of months to mature before using. Use within 2 years.

Variations

For each variation, use 2 1/2 cups of light brown sugar, 2 1/2 cups of cider vinegar or white wine vinegar, a pinch of salt, and 2 teaspoons of dried chile flakes (if using) and follow the basic method.

Gingered rhubarb and fig (spring)

- For the spice bag
- 2 teaspoons yellow mustard seeds
 - 2 teaspoons black peppercorns
 - 2 ounces fresh ginger, bruised
 - 3 pounds, 6 ounces rhubarb, trimmed and chopped
 - 2 1/4 pounds cooking apples, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces onions, peeled and diced
 - 2 1/2 cups dried figs, chopped and soaked overnight in the juice of 3 large oranges with the grated zest of 2 oranges
 - 3 1/2 ounces crystallized ginger, chopped

Apricot and date (late summer)

- For the spice bag
- 2 ounces fresh ginger, bruised
 - 1 teaspoon cloves
 - 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
 - 1 teaspoon coriander seeds
 - 2 teaspoons black peppercorns
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces unsulfured dried apricots, chopped, soaked overnight, and drained
 - 2 1/4 pounds summer squash, peeled (if need be) and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces cooking apples, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces onions, peeled and diced
 - 1 1/2 cups pitted dates, chopped
 - 1 1/2 cups raisins

Plum and pear (late summer)

- For the spice bag
- 2 ounces fresh ginger, bruised
 - 2 teaspoons yellow mustard seeds
 - 2 teaspoons black peppercorns
 - 2 1/4 pounds plums, quartered and pitted
 - 1 pound, 10 ounces pears, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 10 ounces cooking apples, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 2 ounces shallots, peeled and diced
 - 1 1/2 cups pitted prunes, coarsely chopped

Pumpkin and quince (early autumn)

- For the spice bag
- 2 teaspoons peppercorns
 - 12 cloves
 - 2 cinnamon sticks
 - 2 1/4 pounds peeled and deseeded pumpkin, diced
 - 2 1/4 pounds quince, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 10 ounces cooking apples, peeled, cored, and diced
 - 1 pound, 10 ounces red onions, peeled and diced
 - 3 cups raisins
 - 2 ounces freshly grated horseradish root