



Preserving Summer's Harvest the Low-Sugar Way!

Article by Shannon Valdarez

As your garden becomes more productive, you may start thinking about preserving some of your own food. You may be surprised to learn that you do not need a large amount of fruit or sugar to make a great tasting jam! The trick to making a low or no-sugar jam is to use commercial store-

bought pectin specifically made for using a limited amount of sugar.

This is my preferred way of making small-batch jam with fruit from my own garden. There are a few different brands that make low or no-sugar pectin, but two of my favorites are Ball® and Pomona's® Pectin. I like this kind of pectin for a few different reasons. You can adjust the level of sugar you want to use according to your taste. I always start with a small amount of sugar, take the pot off the stove and taste for sweetness. If the fruit is too tart, I can add more sugar. The other thing I like about this pectin is that it comes in bulk, so you can measure out how much pectin you need based on how much fruit you have harvested. With regular pectin, the kind where you get one batch of jam per box, you must follow their recipe exactly in order to get a good jell. That means, you must have all the fruit the recipe calls for, which can sometimes be difficult to obtain from the home garden. With a no/low sugar pectin, you adjust the recipe based on how much fruit you have. If you have 2 cups of fruit, you calculate the rest of the recipe based on using 2 cups of fruit. These pectins add an enormous amount of flexibility to your home-canning routine

In this article, I assume you have some basic knowledge of canning guidelines. If you are a complete beginner and need some more instruction, there are many tutorials online that can guide you through the process of canning. A good place to start is www.freshpreserving.com.

One thing to be completely aware of is the acidity of your fruit. Almost all homegrown fruit is high acid, which makes it safe for canning. The one exception to keep in mind is Asian pears. They are not a high-acid fruit and therefore need to be treated differently. As always when canning, be sure that you are using a reliable recipe or online resource.

In my experience, blueberries make a great jam. They are sweet enough that I do not need to add a large amount of sugar to make it tasty. Raspberries need a bit more sugar or you'll get a tart jam. Strawberry Rhubarb works well with a smaller amount of sugar as well. These are all very doable from the home garden! Use the recipe below with any of your homegrown fruit (adjusting the recipe based on how much fruit you have; also leaving out the cinnamon or nutmeg) and you will have a great small batch of low-sugar jam that you can be proud of.

Blueberry Spice Jam

Makes 2 (8 oz.) half-pints of jam

1-1/3 cups blueberries

1/3 cup unsweetened fruit juice (apple or white grape works nicely)

3 tsp bottled lemon juice
1-1/2 Tbsp Ball Real Fruit Low or No-Sugar needed pectin
Up to 1/2 cup granulated sugar, sugar substitute or honey
1/4 tsp ground cinnamon or nutmeg

Sterilize canning jars. Wash and thoroughly crush blueberries, one layer at a time in a saucepan. Add lemon juice, spice and fruit juice. Stir in pectin and bring to a full rolling boil over high heat, stirring frequently. Add the sugar and stir it in to dissolve. At this point, take the pot off the heat and taste jam to test for sweetness. Add as much or as little as you like. When you have added the desired amount of sugar, bring pot back up to a full rolling boil and boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; quickly skim off foam. Pour jam immediately into hot jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process 5 minutes in a Boiling Water Bath.

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