

April 22, 2020



Spreading A Little Sunshine

By Jan Irwin

UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

As I write this our nation has experienced one of the most significant challenges of our lifetimes. Our normal day-to-day life has been dramatically changed as we have been ordered to “shelter in place”. As I struggle to deal with these changes, I realized that there is nothing I can do to change my circumstances, so as they say “when life gives you lemons you make lemonade”! As I peruse the pantry for necessities to tide us over the next few weeks, I realized that a staple on the menu may be a few more simple meals like sandwiches. And admit it, nothing beats a good old-fashioned peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

In my opinion, the process of making jelly is much like making bread. In a very short time and with a tested recipe you have something that will put smiles on the faces of even the dourest of individuals. Making jelly is also a great way to get some of those little ones who are out of school involved. There is lots of stirring to be done while teaching them a bit about chemistry. There are three main components to jams and jellies- acid, pectin and sugar. Most jams and jellies contain between 65-68 percent sugar. That is because sugar is a necessary ingredient not just to make jams and jelly sweet but also to preserve it. “Sugar imparts a preservative effect. By binding water molecules to itself, it reduces the amount of water available in the jam, to the point at which it is too low for microbial growth, helping to ensure that the jam doesn’t go off too rapidly after it’s been made”¹. Always use reputable recipes with detailed instructions and do not alter the amount of sugar called for in a recipe or substitute with another sweetener. Instead, find a tested low sugar recipe. Also, don’t try to double the recipe; the extended cooking time breaks down the effectiveness of the pectin resulting in a runny jam or jelly.

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Here is my favorite good old-fashioned recipe for grape jelly from the Utah State Extension.

Grape Jelly (With added pectin) Yield: about 6 half-pints

5 cups grape juice (about 4 1/2 pounds Concord grapes)

1 package powdered pectin

5 cups sugar

To make jelly: Juice may be used fresh, canned or frozen previously. Combine grape juice and pectin in large saucepot. Bring to boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Add sugar, stirring until dissolved. Return mixture to rolling boil. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Skim foam if necessary. Ladle hot jelly into hot jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Adjust two-piece caps. Process in a boiling water or atmospheric steam canner; for altitudes 0-1000 ft, 5 min, 1001-6000 ft, 10 min, above 6000 ft, 15 min.

¹ <https://www.compoundchem.com/2014/09/22/what-makes-jam-set-the-chemistry-of-jam-making/>

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and recent California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, UCCE Central Sierra cancelled all Master Food Preserver and Master Gardener public events and classes in El Dorado and Amador County. This cancellation remains in effect through May 10th, and will be updated as public health guidelines change.

We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. We will attempt to offer our cancelled classes and events at a future time if feasible.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program and events, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our ENewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!