

Low Sugar Preserving

By Summer Brasuel

UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers

Fans are asking for low sugar recipes. The Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County can accommodate! MFPs like requests!

But first, a little information on low sugar recipes, especially low sugar jams and jellies. One must understand that there is always a compromise. Sugar is a preservative. It ties up water molecules and helps prevent mold and other bacteria from growing in the food. When choosing to use less sugar there are things that must be taken into consideration.

Quick Facts...

- All fruits can safely be canned or frozen without sugar.
- Sweet relish and pickle recipes do not adapt as well to sugar-free canning as do plain fruits.
- Use recipes from reliable sources. Process all pickles by the boiling-water method using timetables adjusted for altitude.
- Jams and jellies can be made without added sugar (using a recipe from a reliable source) but will resemble more of a fruited gelatin desert than a true jam or jelly.
- Salt is not necessary for safe processing of canned or frozen fruits and vegetables. It is necessary for the preservation of most pickles and cured or smoked foods.

The compromises made with low sugar recipes are:

- A shorter shelf life
 - Where full sugar recipes last a year and well beyond, low sugar recipes last 6 months to a year.
 - Products made with less sugar last a week or two in the refrigerator, where a full sugar recipe will last months.
- Flavor, color, texture and nutritional value will start to diminish much sooner than a full sugar recipe.

Because the shelf life is significantly less, plan to make only what the family can eat before the product goes bad. The above rules apply to all home preserved products with less sugar, too.

A few more Do's and Don'ts for low sugar jams and jellies:

- Use a low sugar recipe from a safe source such as the National Center for Home Food Preservation.
- If using pectin, use a low/no sugar pectin. These are available in most stores where canning supplies are sold.
- Do not simply reduce the amount of sugar in a given full sugar recipe. Chances are the jam/jelly will not gel and the end result will be more of a sauce.
- To prevent spoilage, process jars of low-sugar jams and jellies longer in a boiling water-bath canner than regular jams or jellies. Carefully follow recipes and processing times provided with each modified pectin product. Altering the proportion of acids and fruits may result in spoilage.

One more tip: remember to adjust for elevation, if needed. Not everybody lives at the same altitude. At sea level, water boils at 212° F. All recipes are developed using sea level as the criteria for processing

times. At higher altitudes water will boil at a lower temperature. Adjustments have to be made to insure safe canning.

This recipe won 1st prize at the El Dorado County Fair last year.

LOW SUGAR PEAR JAM

4 cups peeled, cored and finely chopped pears (~9 medium pears)
2 Tbsp. bottled lemon juice
1 pkg. No Sugar Needed Pectin
1 cup unsweetened grape juice
¼ tsp. butter or margarine
3 cups sugar (21 ounces)

Place chopped pears, grape juice and lemon juice in a non-reactive pot. Gradually stir in pectin. Add butter or margarine to reduce foaming. Bring mixture to a boil; then add 3 cups sugar (21 ounces) and bring back to a full rolling boil that can't be stirred down. Stir constantly for 3 minutes at full rolling boil. Remove from heat and skim off foam, if necessary. Fill hot jars, leaving ¼" headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe the rims clean. Place lids and rings on jars, tightening rings finger tight. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath canner. Adjust for elevation if necessary.

Yield: 4 to 6 half pints.

Source: Ball

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive the new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.

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