

Jam from High-Pectin Berries

As you may know from recipes, *any* fruit can be made into jam by adding store-bought pectin. But some fruits – especially both **black and red currants** and **gooseberries** – contain quite a lot of natural pectin, so they make great jam or jelly with only sugar added. (*Sugar, acid, and pectin* are the three ingredients responsible for the chemical reaction that causes most jelly or jam to jell to the right consistency). No-sugar or low-sugar pectins use other ingredients to fill that role (although not with as good results, IMHO).

If you're planning to use your currants for jelly or jam, *pick them at the earliest opportunity* when they're still loaded with pectin. Red currants in particular will hang on the bushes for a long time, gaining sugar and losing pectin and acid as they continue to ripen, so early-season fruits (with the most pectin) will require the shortest cooking time to jell.

BLACK CURRANTS alone make the world's easiest (and possibly best!) jam:

- Sterilize your jam jars and lids in boiling water.
- Remove big stems from black currants and cook until softened **with just enough water to prevent sticking**.
- Use a food mill to remove seeds, if desired, or simply mash the cooked fruit. Measure the cooked fruit and add an equal volume of sugar. Heat to a full rolling boil.
- Pour into sterile jars and seal.

(DON'T try this no-canning method with reduced sugar or alternative sweeteners – jam may not store safely.)

SPECIAL TIP: If you're especially fond of black currants, you can “stretch” your black currant jam, at least to a certain point, by adding red currants – the more pronounced black currant flavor tends to dominate.

RED CURRANTS make truly gorgeous jelly. Since the jelly-making process removes the seeds and skins, you'll get much less jelly than jam from the same amount of fruit. Depending on your perspective, this is either an awful waste or an excellent way to use up an abundance of red currants if you don't like them in any other form!

- Sterilize your jam jars and lids in boiling water.
- Remove big stems from currants. If you have a steam juicer, by all means use it! Otherwise, cook berries *in just enough water to prevent sticking* until they're very soft and the skins lose color. Dump the cooked berries into a colander lined with a damp cloth and allow to drain until the dripping stops. For the brightest, clearest jelly, don't press on the draining pulp. (I warned you about reduced volume, right?)
- Measure the juice. If your berries were just barely ripe, add an equal volume of sugar and heat to a *full rolling boil* (i.e., it doesn't stop boiling when you stir it). If your berries were riper (in the second or third week of picking), use less sugar – as little as $\frac{3}{4}$ as much by volume – and boil until a spoonful tipped onto a chilled plate sets up in just a minute or two.
- Pour into sterile jars and seal.

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In fact, currants are so full of pectin, they can actually “share” some with other fruits in mixtures, such as:

Raspberry-Currant Jam

2 cups currant pulp
2 cups crushed raspberries
3 cups sugar

- Cook currants until soft, then press through a sieve or food mill (or just mash, if you don't mind the seeds; red currants tend to be seedier than black).
- Measure pulp. Combine currant pulp, raspberries and sugar.
- Bring slowly to boiling, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly almost to jelling point, about 30 minutes. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking.
- Pour boiling hot, into hot Ball jars.
- Adjust caps; process in a hot water bath for 10-15 minutes.

Yields about 2 pints.

SPECIAL TIP: Black currants with black raspberries are an especially tasty combo. Red currants are an obvious combination with red raspberries, but they also combine well with peaches or cherries.