

Homemade Pie Fillings Pack Flavor And Nutrition



Nancy Wiker, family living and consumer science agent, demonstrates the convenience of having home canned pie filling on hand.

LOU ANN GOOD Lancaster Farming Staff

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — If you've tasted homemade pie fillings, you'll never want to resort to store-purchased varieties again.

This is the season to gather tree- and vine-ripen fruits and preserve them for use during cold, winter months. Some freeze or can the fruit and make the pie filling when needed. But if you prepare the pie filling ahead of time, it is much more convenient to use on the spur of the moment — and the taste is unbeatable.

Nancy Wiker, family living and consumer science agent, conducted a pie filling workshop recently at the Lancaster Extension kitchen. She demonstrated making pie filling using fresh peaches, blueberries, and cherries, and addressed problems that cooks face when preparing pie fillings.

Remember to select sweet, very ripe, but firm, vividly-colored fruit. If fruit is unripe or overly-ripe, the end result is not as favorable or as eye-appealing. Numerous thickeners are available for making pies. The most traditional are flour and corn starch. However, in recent years, Clear Jel has become a favorite among bakers.

Clear Jel is a corn starch that has been modified to give it special and unique characteristics when used in food products. It can be used for canning fruit pie fillings because it does not break down in the acid food mixtures and does not thicken enough during heat processing to interfere with the killing effect on bacteria during canning.

Clear Jel is preferred for thickening canned pie fillings as well

as other foods because it has less or no aftertaste, the thickened juices are smooth and clear, and foods thickened with Clear Jel may be frozen.

However, there are two forms of Clear Jel — regular and instant. "Do not use instant Clear Jel for pie fillings," Wiker warned workshop participants. Instant Clear Jel must be mixed thoroughly with sugar or it will glob or string.

Clear Jel is not always available in supermarkets. You can often find it where bulk foods are sold or mailorder from the following sources:

Kitchen Krafts, P.O. Box 442, Waukon, IA 52172.

Sweet Celebrations/Maid of Scandinavia, 7009 Washington Ave. S, Edina, MN 55439.

Home Canning Essentials (Altrista), P.O. Box 2005, Muncie, IN 47307-0005.

Wiker also advises cooks to stick to the same brand of flour as flours react differently.

Corn starch, Clear Jel, and other thickeners lose their thickening ability as they age so discard outdated items.

Sugar does more than sweeten fruit. In cooking and baking, sugar helps fruit to keep its shape.

Many pie filling recipes call for lemon juice. Wiker said lemon juice should be added after the filling is thickened, because lemon juice prevents thickening.

Here are some pie fillings tested by Penn State Extension. Amounts are given for one pie. Multiply amounts as needed. For example, if your canner processes seven quarts, multiply each ingredient amount by seven.



Workshops are the ideal places to have cooking mysteries solved and learn why cooking failures sometimes happen. Another plus is that participants can taste the dishes used for demonstration to determine whether or not they want to duplicate the recipes at home.

BLUEBERRY PIE FILLING

1-quart

- 3 1/2 cups fresh or thawed blueberries
- 1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon Clear Jel
- 1 cup cold water
- 3 1/2 teaspoons bottled lemon juice
- 3 drops blue food coloring
- 1 drop red food coloring

Wash and drain blueberries.

For fresh fruit, place six cups at a time in one gallon boiling water. Boil each batch one minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain but keep heated fruit in a covered bowl or pot. Combine sugar and Clear Jel in a large kettle. Stir. Add water, and, if desired, food coloring. Cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil one minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained berries, fill jars immediately with mixture, leaving one-inch headspace, and process without delay.

CHERRY PIE FILLING

1-quart

- 3 1/4 cups fresh or thawed sour cherries
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon Clear Jel
- 1 1/2 cups cold water
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon bottled lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon (optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract
- 6 drops red food coloring (optional)

Select very ripe, firm, tart cherries. Rinse and pit cherries, and hold in cold water. To prevent stem end browning, hold pitted cherries in water containing one teaspoon ascorbic acid crystals or six 500 mg vitamin C tablets in one gallon water. For fresh fruit, place six cups at a time in one gallon boiling water. Boil each batch one minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain but keep heated fruit in a covered bowl or pot. Combine sugar and Clear Jel in large saucepan. Add water and, if desired, cinnamon, food coloring, and almond extract. Stir mixture and cook over medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to

bubble. Add lemon juice and boil one minute, stirring continuously with mixture, leaving one-inch headspace, and process without delay.

PEACH PIE FILLING

1-quart

- 3 1/2 cups fresh sliced peaches
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon Clear Jel
- 1/4 cup cold water
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon almond extract
- 1/4 cup bottled lemon juice

Select ripe but firm peaches.

Peel peaches. To loosen skins submerge peaches in boiling water for 30-60 seconds, and place in cold water for 20 seconds. Slip off skins and prepare slices 1/2-inch wide. Place slices in water containing 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid crystals or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets in one gallon of water to prevent browning. For fresh fruit, place 6 cups at a time in one gallon boiling water. Boil each batch one minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain but keep heated fruit in a covered bowl or pot. Combine sugar, Clear Jel, water, and cinnamon or almond extract in a large kettle. Stir and cook on medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil sauce one minute more, stirring constantly. Fold in drained peach slices and continue to heat for 3 minutes, then fill jars with mixture, leaving one-inch headspace, and process without delay.

PROCEDURE FOR CANNING ALL FILLINGS

Wash jars. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's instructions. Fill fruit mixtures into jars, leaving one-inch headspace. Wipe sealing surface of jars with a clean, damp paper towel. Add lids, tighten screw bands, and process.

To process in a boiling water canner, preheat canner half-filled with water to 180-degrees. Load sealed jars into the canner rack and lower with handles; or load one jar at a time with a jar lifter onto rack in canner. Add water if needed to a level of one-inch above jars and cover. When water boils vigorously, lower heat to maintain a gentle boil and process for recommended time: Apple fruit filling, pints or quarts - 25 minutes. Blueberry, cherry, and peach pie filling - 30 minutes.

After processing is completed, remove jars from canner with a jar lifter and place on towel or rack. Do not retighten screw bands. Air-cool jars 12 to 24 hours. Remove screw bands and check lid seals. A jar is sealed if the center of its lid is indented or concave. Wash, dry, label, and store sealed jars in a clean, cool, dark place. If a jar is unsealed, examine and replace if it is defective, use a new lid, and reprocess as before. Wash screw bands and store separately. Fillings are best if used one year and safe as long as lids remain vacuum sealed.



Participants discover that pie fillings also make tasty cobblers.

