

## Well Preserved

### What's the Problem? Jellied Products

*The Well Preserved news column is prepared by Lancaster County Cooperative Extension. It includes food preservation information and questions.*

Even the best food preserver has had the experience of making jelly or jam the same way as always and for some reason the product does not turn out right on a particular occasion. This scenario requires some problem solving.

Why is the jelly (or jam) too thin? This problem has many possibilities from ingredients to preservation methods. The ripeness of the fruit affects the consistency of the jelly. Over-ripe fruit contains less natural pectin than just-ripe fruit and may result in a thinner spread even if commercial pectin is added. The opposite effect is also true. An under-ripe fruit contains more natural pectin and may give a more firm result than usual.

Incorrect proportions of sugar, acid, pectin, and fruit can cause problems. Use tested recipes and measure accurately. Too little sugar results in a thin jam; too much sugar results in a thicker jam. Insufficient acid results in a soft gel. Some fruits require added acid in the form of lemon juice if the fruit does not have enough acid. Excess fruit makes the jelly thinner; less fruit makes a thicker jelly.

The order in which these basic ingredients are combined depends upon the type of added pectin used. Powdered pectin is combined with the fruit and the sugar is added last. Liquid pectin is added after the fruit and sugar have come to a boil. Powdered and liquid pectin cannot be substituted for one another without disastrous results. With the many new jelling products on the market, it is important to follow the directions provided with the product.

Overcooking the fruit to extract the juice lowers the jellying capacity of the pectin in the fruit. Using too much water to extract the juice can be another problem.

Proper cooking affects the consistency of the finished product. Jellies and jams with added pectin must be cooked for the specified time at a rolling boil. A rolling boil is a rapid boil that cannot be stirred down. It bubbles up, which is why you need a large kettle when making jams and jellies. Over cooking can break down the pectin. It really requires a judgment call as to what is a rolling boil. Long slow cooking destroys the pectin in the fruit juice which can be a problem for jellies made without added pectin. Jellies without added pectin need to be cooked rapidly to the jelling point (240°F).

Why should cooked jelly be made in small batches? If a



larger quantity of juice is used, it will be necessary to boil it longer, thus causing loss of flavor, darkening of jelly, and toughening of jelly. Make only one recipe if using added pectin or use only four to six cups of juice in each batch of jelly made without added pectin.

Do not move jellied products for 12 hours after they are made. Some types of jelly and jam require up to a week to set. Therefore, you may want to wait awhile before deciding to remake a syrupy spread.

Over-processing jellies and jams in the boiling water bath can cause the pectin to break down. Process spreads that have been canned in sterilized jars for 5 minutes in the boiling water bath; process spreads that have been put in clean jars that have not been sterilized for 10 minutes in the boiling water bath.

Why are there bubbles on the top of the jelly? If you notice bubbles when you first make the jelly, the pan or the pouring utensil may have been too far from the top of the jar as the jelly was poured or the jelly may have been poured slowly

allowing the air to become trapped in the hot jelly. Failure to skim the foam off the jelly before pouring it into jars may result in bubbles on the top and throughout the jelly. Adding ½ teaspoon butter or margarine before cooking the jelly or jam will reduce foaming. If you notice bubbles after the jelly has been in storage a period of time, they may indicate spoilage and the jelly should not be used.

Why does the jelly look cloudy? The juice may have been squeezed through the jelly bag forcing out some of the solids. Let the juice drip through the jelly bag and squeeze the bag gently if necessary. Also the jelly may have been allowed to stand before it was poured into the jars; it should be poured into the jars immediately upon reaching the gelling point.

Why do fruit preserves sometimes shrivel? The syrup is too heavy for the fruit. Follow instructions for the specific type of fruit being preserved.

Why does jelly "weep?" Excess acid in the juice makes the pectin unstable or the jelly was stored in too warm a place or the storage temperature fluctuated.

In the next Well Preserved column we will look at how to remake a thin jelly.

If you have food preservation questions, a home economist is available to answer questions on Wednesdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m., call (717) 394-6851 or write Penn State Cooperative Extension, Lancaster County, 1383 Arcadia Rd., Rm. 1, Lancaster, PA 17601.

## Food Preservation Class Offered

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — Remember those delicious home canned goods that Grandma used to put up from her backyard garden? Canning procedures have changed dramatically over the years, but many folks still look forward to eating the "fruits of their labor" over the winter months with home preserved foods. To make sure you don't endanger your family's health by following out-of-date canning instructions, Penn State Cooperative Extension is offering a hands-on workshop to teach proper methods of home canning.

The three-hour session will be conducted on Thursday, June 26 at 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and repeated at 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Montgomery County 4-H Center on Rt. 113 in Creamery.

Participants will learn the latest methods of using a boiling water bath and a pressure canner. They will receive a comprehensive Cooperative Extension canning book and take home two jars of properly processed fruits and vegetables.

Registration is required and class size is limited. There is a cost of \$25 per person or \$40 per couple. To register, call the extension office at (610) 489-4315.



## 2003 Auctioneer Guide Booklet June 21, 2003

The premier issue of the Lancaster Farming Auctioneer Guide will be your home reference source to the major auction companies in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

The booklet is scheduled to include:

- Interviews with auctioneer association leaders.
- Frequently asked questions and answers about auctioning and auctions in general.
- Biographies of auction company leaders.
- Features on collectibles and collecting.

Be a part of  
this comprehensive  
guide!

**Advertising Deadline: June 6**  
**Call 717-626-2191 717-721-4415**

