

Well Preserved

Fruit Pie Fillings

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

In addition to using in pies, canned pie fillings make a fast, easy topping for cheesecake, serve as fillings for cakes and Danishes, and add color and flavor over an angel food cake with ice cream.

Reproducing these tasty fruit fillings has been a challenge for the home canner because adding starch in the form of flour, cornstarch, or tapioca to a canned product creates both safety and textural problems.

The common household starches break down during the canning process causing a runny consistency. Commercially prepared pie fillings use a modified food starch to overcome these problems.

The home food preserver can make fruit fillings with excellent and safe results using Clear Jel, which is a modified food starch that withstands the canning process. Unlike ordinary cornstarch, Clear Jel works well with acidic ingredients, tolerates high temperatures, and doesn't cause pie fillings to "weep" during storage. It is a good choice for canning homemade pie fillings because it doesn't begin thickening until the liquid begins to cool. This allows heat to be distributed more evenly within the jar dur-

ing processing. This is an important safety advantage because the starch is not thick enough to interfere with the killing of spoilage organisms during processing.

It is the only thickener the USDA recommends for home canning. However, don't freeze products made with Clear Jel as they tend to break down when frozen. It is available only through a few supply outlets and is not available in most grocery stores.

In Lancaster County Clear Jel can be found in many stores where bulk foods are sold. Find out about its availability before gathering other ingredients to make fruit pie filling. Make sure you are getting the type of Clear Jel that requires cooking-sometimes called Clear Jel type A. The instant type of Clear Jel will not work in recipes requiring cooking and is only suitable for frozen pies. There are about 3 cups in 1 pound of Clear Jel.

Recipes have been tested for canning apple, blueberry, cherry, and peach pie fillings. Below is one of the tested recipes. You can obtain the others by calling the cooperative extension office and asking for the flyer "Let's Preserve Fruit Pie Fillings."

Because the variety of fruit may alter the flavor of the fruit pie, you should first prepare a single quart, make a pie with it, and taste it. Then adjust the sugar and spices in the recipe to suit your personal preferences. The amount of lemon juice to

fruit and liquid should not be altered because it affects the safety and storage stability of the filling. Do not substitute any other thickener for the Clear Jel.

Blueberry Pie Filling

For one quart to test recipe use:

- 3½ cups fresh blueberries
 - ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
 - ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon Clear Jel
 - 1 cup cold water
 - 3 drops blue food coloring (optional)
 - 1 drop red food coloring (optional)
 - 3½ teaspoons bottled lemon juice
- Ingredients needed for 7 quart jars:
- 6 quarts fresh blueberries
 - 6 cups sugar
 - 2¼ cups Clear Jel
 - 7 cups cold water
 - 20 drops blue food coloring (optional)
 - 7 drops red food coloring (optional)
 - ½ cup bottled lemon juice

Wash and drain blueberries. For fresh fruit, place 6 cups of blueberries at a time in 1 gallon boiling water. Boil each batch 1 minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain but keep the heated fruit in a covered bowl. 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, immediately fill jars with mixture, leaving 1-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process pint or quart jars immediately in a boiling water bath for 30 minutes.

Note: Frozen blueberries can be used in the above recipe. Follow the same basic recipe, but make these changes. Select unsweetened frozen berries if possible. If sweetened fruit is used, rinse the fruit while it is still frozen. As the fruit thaws, collect any juice and use it for part of the water specified in the recipe. Use ¼ cup Clear Jel for one quart, and use 1¼ cups Clear Jel for seven quarts.

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Cooperative Extension is implied. 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.

Lebanon Area Announces Queen Contest

LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — Entries are being accepted for the 2003 Lebanon Area Fair Queen Contest.

The contest is open to residents of Lebanon County who are at least 16 years of age and not over 20 years of age by June 1. Contestants must be single, never married, have no children, and must not marry during the reign. Former winners may not compete again, and all contestants must have a parent or guardian's consent to compete.

The competition consists of a 300 word written essay on "What My Fair Means To Me," as well as a 3-5 minute speech titled "Why You Should Come To My Fair." Entrants will be judged on poise, essay, speech, and interview.

The winner must be available to represent the fair whenever needed during the entire week of the fair and in parades, promotions, etc. throughout the year.

The 2003 Lebanon Area Fair runs from July 26 to August 2 at the Lebanon Area Fairgrounds.

Gifts will be given to all who enter and the winner receives an assortment of prizes provided by local businesses. The Lebanon Area Fair Queen will be eligible to enter the Pennsylvania State Fair Queen Contest where the winner receives a \$1,000 scholarship.

Entry deadline is July 11. For more information please contact the Fair Office at (717) 273-3795.



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