

Home Canned Fruit Pie Fillings

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NOTE: This publication is intended for use by individuals with a basic understanding of canning procedures. For more detailed information, consult the **USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning**, which is available at https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html.

Tasty fruit fillings for pies, pastries, and dessert toppings can be prepared at home. The following pie fillings are excellent, safe products when processed according to the directions in each recipe. Each canned quart makes one 8- to 9-inch pie.

Many factors affect a fruit's flavor, so you may wish to adjust the sugar and spices in each recipe to suit your tastes. This is best done by preparing a single quart of filling, making a pie, and tasting it. However, never decrease the amount of lemon juice in the recipe because it ensures the filling's safety and storage stability.

GENERAL CANNING PROCEDURES

Use regular or wide-mouth Mason jars with self-sealing lids held in place by screw-on metal bands. The bands hold the lids in place during the processing and cooling periods. Mason jars are made of tempered glass to resist high temperatures. Jars are available in 1/2-pint,

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pint, 1 1/2-pint, and quart sizes. Larger jars are not recommended for home canning.

Inspect jars carefully for cracks or chips and discard faulty ones. Wash jars in hot, soapy water and rinse thoroughly, or wash in the dishwasher. When canning, keep jars hot by storing them in the dishwasher, a sink of hot water, or in a warm oven until they are filled. Check metal screw bands for signs of rust or dents and discard badly corroded or dented bands. Use only new self-sealing lids and follow manufacturer's directions for preparing lids for canning. Ladle fruit mixture into jars, leaving a 1-inch headspace, or as indicated. Wipe the sealing surface of jars with a clean, damp paper towel. Add lids, tighten screw bands, and process in a boiling-water canner.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL BOILING-WATER CANNING:

1. Fill the canner halfway with water.
2. Preheat water to 140°F for raw-packed foods, or 180°F for hot-packed foods.
3. Load filled jars, fitted with lids and bands, into the canner rack and use the handles to lower the rack into the water; or fill the canner, one jar at a time, using a jar lifter.
4. Add enough water so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. For processing times

over 30 minutes, the water level should be at least 2 inches above the tops of the jars.

5. Turn heat to its highest position, put the lid on the canner, and heat until water boils vigorously.
6. Set a timer for the minutes required for processing the food (Table 1).
7. Keep the canner covered and lower the heat setting to maintain a gentle boil throughout the process schedule.
8. During processing, add more boiling water so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. For processing times over 30 minutes, the water level should be at least 2 inches above the tops of the jars.
9. When jars have been boiled for the required time, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid. Wait 5 minutes before removing jars.
10. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars and place them on a towel, leaving at least 1-inch spaces between the jars during cooling. Let jars sit undisturbed at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours to cool.

TEST FOR JAR SEALS

Remove screw bands when jars have cooled (12 to 24 hours) and test for vacuum seals by these methods:

- Press the lid center with your finger. If the lid springs up when released, it is not sealed.
- Tap the lid with a small metal spoon. A sealed jar lid will make a ringing sound.
- Hold the jar at eye level and look across the lid. A sealed jar lid curves down slightly in the center.

If liquid has been lost from sealed jars, do not open the jars to replace the liquid; instead, store them in the refrigerator and use these first.

REPROCESSING UNSEALED JARS

If you decide to reprocess foods from jars that did not seal, do so within 24 hours. Remove and discard lids from unsealed jars. Check the sealing surface of the jar for tiny nicks or cracks. If the jar has defects, discard it and replace it with another jar. If not, add a new lid and process for the original processing time. Label

food that has been re-canned, store in the refrigerator, and use within several days. The produce will be softer in texture and lower in nutritional value than food processed once.

STORING CANNED FOOD

If lids are tightly vacuum-sealed, remove the screw bands from sealed jars to prevent them from rusting closed on the jars. Wash, dry, and store the screw bands for later use. Clean the outsides of sealed, cooled jars. Label with date and contents and store in a cool (50–70°F), dark, dry place away from sun, light, or dampness. Canned products are best if eaten within one year.

ACCIDENTAL FREEZING

Freezing may cause food in jars to spoil if the jars become unsealed. Freezing and thawing cause food to soften and decrease its nutritional quality. Protect jars from freezing by wrapping with layers of newspaper.

IF CANNED FOOD SPOILS

Examine jars carefully before tasting contents. Check lids for a vacuum seal. **NEVER** taste food from an unsealed jar.

Signs of food spoilage are streaks and dried food at the top of the jar, swollen lids, broken jar seals, rising air bubbles, and any unnatural color. Other indicators include bad or unnatural odor, spurting liquid, foaming, or white, blue, green, or black mold.

Dispose of any food you suspect of being spoiled. For safety, spoiled canned food and containers may need to be detoxified before disposal. Contact your county Extension office for detoxification instructions.

ELEVATION ADJUSTMENTS

All communities in New Mexico are above sea level, varying from 3,000 to 10,000 feet, with elevation differences even within a county. The boiling temperature of liquids is lower at higher elevations, and therefore food must be processed longer at high elevations (Table 1). Use Table 2 to determine the elevation of your community, and then select safe processing times from Table 1 for canning your fruit.

Table 1. Recommended Processing Times for Fruit Pie Fillings in a Boiling-Water Canner

Fruit filling	Jar size	Process times at elevations of		
		up to 3,000 ft	3,001–6,000 ft	6,001–9,000 ft
Apple	Pints or quarts	30 min	35 min	40 min
Blueberry		35 min	40 min	45 min
Cherry		35 min	40 min	45 min
Peach		35 min	40 min	45 min

Table 2. Elevations of Cities and Towns in New Mexico

City/Town	Elevation (ft)	City/Town	Elevation (ft)
Alamogordo	4,350	Las Vegas	6,450
Albuquerque	5,000	Logan	3,830
Artesia	3,350	Lordsburg	4,250
Aztec	5,650	Los Alamos	7,400
Bayard	5,800	Los Ranchos de Alb.	4,950
Belen	4,800	Lovington	3,900
Bernalillo	5,050	Magdalena	6,555
Bosque Farms	4,865	Melrose	4,600
Carlsbad	3,100	Mora	7,200
Carrizozo	5,450	Mosquero	5,550
Chama	7,900	Mountainair	6,500
Cimarron	6,450	Portales	4,010
Clayton	5,050	Raton	6,650
Cloudcroft	8,650	Reserve	5,750
Clovis	4,300	Rio Rancho	5,290
Columbus	4,020	Roswell	3,600
Corona	6,665	Roy	5,900
Corrales	5,005	Ruidoso	7,000
Cuba	7,000	San Jon	4,200
Deming	4,300	Santa Fe	7,000
Dexter	3,500	Santa Rita	6,300
Eagle Nest	8,250	Santa Rosa	4,600
Elida	4,345	Silver City	5,900
Española	5,600	Socorro	4,600
Estancia	6,100	Springer	5,800
Farmington	5,400	Taos	7,000
Fort Sumner	4,050	Texico	4,150
Gallup	6,500	Tierra Amarilla	7,460
Grants	6,450	T or C	4,250
Hobbs	3,650	Tucumcari	4,100
Hurley	5,700	Tularosa	4,500
Jemez Springs	6,200	Vaughn	5,950
Las Cruces	3,900	Wagon Mound	6,200

SPECIAL NOTICE ABOUT CLEAR JEL

The following recipes all use a modified food starch called Clear Jel, which is recommended by the USDA for home canned fruit pie fillings. This starch produces the correct thickening, even after fillings are canned and baked. Other starches, such as cornstarch, break down and result in a runny filling. Clear Jel must be used as the thickener in these recipes; there is no appropriate substitute.

Clear Jel may not be available in all grocery stores, but it is easy to find online. Obtain your

Clear Jel before preparing these pie fillings. One pound of Clear Jel yields about 3 cups. The following fruit pie filling recipes use about 1 1/2 to 2 1/4 cups per 6 to 7 quarts of pie filling.

Before adding Clear Jel and sugar to liquid (juice and water), make a slurry with small amount of the liquid. This will prevent “clumping.” An immersion blender can be used to make a slurry that will not have clumps and will be easier to incorporate with the other ingredients.



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Quality. Use firm, crisp apples. Stayman, Golden Delicious, Rome, and other varieties of similar quality are suitable. If apples lack tartness, add an additional 1/4 cup of lemon juice for each 6 quarts of slices.

Procedure. Wash, peel, and core apples. Cut into slices 1/2 inch wide. Prevent browning by placing slices in one gallon of water mixed with 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets. Place 6 cups of apples at a time in 1 gallon of boiling water and cook for 1 minute after the water returns to a boil; drain well. Keep heated apples in a covered pot or bowl to retain heat while other batches of apples are being blanched.

In a large pot, combine cold water and apple juice, then stir in sugar, Clear Jel, and cinnamon. If desired, add food coloring and/or nutmeg. Stir and cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained apple slices. Fill hot jars with mixture, leaving a 1 1/2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Process immediately.

Apple Pie Filling		
	Quantities of ingredients needed for	
Ingredients	1 quart jar	7 quart jars
Fresh sliced apples	3 1/2 cups	6 quarts (24 cups)
Granulated sugar	3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons	5 1/2 cups
Clear Jel	1/4 cup	1 1/2 cups
Cinnamon	1/2 teaspoon	1 tablespoon
Bottled lemon juice	2 tablespoons	3/4 cup
Cold water	1/2 cup	2 1/2 cups
Apple juice	3/4 cup	5 cups
Yellow food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops
Nutmeg (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon

Blueberry Pie Filling		
	Quantities of ingredients needed for	
Ingredients	1 quart jar	7 quart jars
Fresh or thawed blueberries	3 1/2 cups	6 quarts (24 cups)
Granulated sugar	3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons	6 cups
Clear Jel	1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon	2 1/4 cups
Cold water	1 cup	7 cups
Bottled lemon juice	3 tablespoons	1/2 cup
Red food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops
Blue food coloring (optional)	3 drops	20 drops

Quality. Select fresh, ripe, firm blueberries. Unsweetened frozen blueberries can be used. If sugar has been added, rinse it off while the fruit is still frozen. Thaw frozen blueberries before use.

Procedure. Wash and drain blueberries. Place 6 cups of blueberries at a time in 1 gallon of boiling water and cook for 1 minute after the water returns to a boil; drain well. Keep heated blueberries in a covered pot or bowl to retain heat while other batches of blueberries are being blanched.



In a large pot, combine cold water, food coloring (if desired), sugar, and Clear Jel and stir well to mix. Cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained berries. Fill hot jars with mixture, leaving a 2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Process immediately.

Peach Pie Filling		
	Quantities of ingredients needed for	
Ingredients	1 quart jar	7 quart jars
Fresh sliced peaches	3 1/2 cups	6 quarts (24 cups)
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear Jel	1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon	2 cups plus 3 tablespoons
Cold water	3/4 cup	5 1/4 cups
Bottled lemon juice	1/4 cup	1 3/4 cups
Cinnamon (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Almond extract (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon

Quality. Select ripe but firm peaches. Red Haven, Redskin, Sun High, and other varieties of similar quality are suitable.

Procedure. Peel peaches. To loosen skins, submerge peaches in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds, then place in cold water for 20 seconds. Slip off skins and cut into slices 1/2 inch wide. Prevent browning by placing slices in 1 gallon of water

mixed with 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets. Place 6 cups of fresh peach slices at a time in 1 gallon of boiling water and cook for 1 minute after the water returns to a boil; drain well. Keep peaches in a covered pot or bowl to retain heat while other batches of peaches are being blanched.

In a large pot, combine sugar, Clear Jel, and a small amount of the cold water to make a thin slurry. Then add the rest of the cold water to the slurry and whisk to prevent clumping. If desired, add cinnamon and/or almond extract. Stir and cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained peach slices and continue to heat for 3 minutes. Fill hot jars with mixture, leaving a 1 1/2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Process immediately.



Cherry Pie Filling

Ingredients	Quantities of ingredients needed for	
	1 quart jar	7 quart jars
Fresh or thawed sour cherries	3 1/3 cups	6 quarts (24 cups)
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear Jel	1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon	1 3/4 cups
Cold water	1 1/3 cups	9 1/3 cups
Bottled lemon juice	1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon	1/2 cup
Cinnamon (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Red food coloring (optional)	6 drops	1/4 teaspoon
Almond extract (optional)	1/4 teaspoon	2 teaspoons

Quality. Select very ripe, firm, tart cherries. Unsweetened frozen cherries can be used. If sugar has been added, rinse it off while the fruit is still frozen. Thaw frozen cherries before use.

Procedure. Rinse and pit cherries. To keep the stem ends from browning, hold pitted cherries in 1 gallon of water mixed with 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets. Place 6 cups of fresh cherries at a time in 1 gallon of boiling water and cook for 1 minute after the water returns to a boil; drain well. Keep heated cherries in a covered pot or bowl to retain heat while other batches of cherries are being blanched.

In a large saucepan, combine cold water, sugar, Clear Jel, and cinnamon (optional). If desired, add food coloring and/or almond extract. Stir and cook over medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained cherries. Fill hot jars immediately with mixture, leaving a 2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Process immediately.

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