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## 12-Step Jam

This recipe is simple and easily scalable, perfect for the oral tradition: 4 cups fruit, 1 cup berries, and ¼ cup lemon juice. For small batches, this recipe is unsurpassed in its simplicity. If you are a culinary experimenter, try adding a few pinches of an herb, ginger, or lemon zest to the jam when it has begun to visibly thicken, near the end of the process. This recipe that follows is based on a batch of 12 cups of fruit, because that is the smallest batch that is reasonable to make. Any less fruit and you'll run out of jam too quickly. If you have more than 20 cups of fruit, consider splitting the batch into two, because too big of a batch will take forever to cook and will never set as well as you'd like. The yield depends on your individual taste and patience for stirring scalding liquid.

— Daniel Perry

Makes 4–6 half-pints.

### Equipment

- 8- to 12-quart saucepan with high sides and a lid *(The high sides prevent jam from splattering everywhere.)*
- 8-quart bowl or container with a lid *(You can cover a bowl or pot full of fruit with plastic wrap but a lid is easier and produces less waste.)*
- Long-handled wooden spoon *(If it is long enough to keep your hand out of the pot, you will avoid burning yourself 90 percent of the time. I prefer wood to plastic or silicone.)*
- 2-quart (or larger) colander or sieve
- 12-quart (or larger) canning pot with a lid, for sterilizing and pressurizing
- Jars, lids, and bands
- Long-handled ladle
- Funnel *(Ball, the popular mason jar brand, often sells funnels alongside jars in supermarkets.)*
- Tongs
- Baking sheet covered with a clean dishtowel, for drying sterilized items
- Ceramic plate or bowl, at room temperature
- Large silicone spatula, optional *(This will allow you to enjoy the jam that the ladle cannot reach.)*

### Ingredients

- 12 cups of fruit, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 4 quarts of whole fruit will give you a little extra for snacking.
- 3 cups sugar *(I use white because it has the least flavor. If you like a mild, medium, or intense caramel flavor in your jam, use turbinado, light brown, or brown sugar.)*
- ¾ cup lemon juice *(Juice two lemons and don't worry if you have more than ¾ cup. The extra citric acid is a natural preservative and prevents oxidation while cooking.)*

## Instructions

1. Rinse fruit. Slice strawberries or pit cherries.
2. Combine fruit, sugar, and lemon juice in an 8- to 12-quart saucepan or bowl. Stir the mixture vigorously for a minute or so, until the sugar has all begun to soak up the fruit juice. At this point the mixture should resemble a heap of fruit covered in sugar, with a little juice gathering at the base.
3. Cover and let it sit on the counter for an hour or so. This will allow for maceration, as the sugar pulls more juice out of the fruit. After this step, the mixture should begin to resemble the consistency of cereal in milk, with small pieces floating in liquid.
4. Place the fruit and sugar mixture into the saucepan (if it is not already there), and put it on the stove over high heat. Allow the fruit to come to a boil, stirring occasionally. This step should take less than 5 minutes. Remove from heat.
5. Let the mixture cool. Cover the saucepan with either a lid or plastic wrap. Let the jam macerate for another hour, at room temperature. If you have enough time and space you can just leave the saucepan on the stove. If you want to take a break, the mixture can be refrigerated (covered) for up to 3 days before it spoils.
6. Empty the saucepan into an 8-quart bowl or container with a lid. Place the sieve in the empty saucepan. Pour the fruit mixture into the strainer, to separate the solids from the syrup, which will gather in the saucepan. The separation of these two elements will allow you to cook the syrup down to a thick, gelatinous consistency without cooking the fruit into smithereens.
7. Stir the fruit solids in the sieve gently. Move the sieve from the saucepan to the empty bowl.

*Note: Steps 8 and 9 happen concurrently.*

8. Place the canning pot filled with water on the stove, covered, over high heat. When the water boils, start step 9 and then place the jars, lids, bands, ladle, and funnel in the boiling water for 5 minutes. Using the tongs, remove these from the canning pot and place them all on the dish-towel-covered cookie sheet. Reduce heat to medium to keep the water close to boiling for pressurizing jars later. Set the items and the cookie sheet aside to cool, turning all of the jars upside-down to drip dry.
9. When the water in the canning pot boils (see step 8), place the saucepan of syrup over high heat. Stir occasionally at the beginning and then vigorously as the syrup begins to boil and foam. After 15 minutes, take the spoon out of the pan, let it drip over the syrup for a few seconds, and then perform a “drip test” by holding the spoon 6 inches above a room-temperature ceramic plate or bowl. If the fifth or sixth droplets to fall hold their form as half-orbs (resembling the erect yolk of a really good, farm-fresh egg in a frying pan)—and do not flatten out immediately into little puddles—then the syrup is thick enough. If the drops are not jelling yet, then the syrup needs a little more time. Repeat the drip test every few minutes as necessary until you have a positive result. If the extended use of high heat is too strenuous, turn the pan down to medium heat (although this will take longer). Once this step has finished, the syrup should be reduced by two-thirds. What boiled off was water, which diluted the flavor of the fresh fruit; removing it concentrates the flavor of the jam.
10. Add the fruit solids to the syrup. Stir vigorously for 15 minutes, and then begin to perform the drip test again. If you want to add an additional flavor, this is the time to do it. I suggest trying 1 to 2 tablespoons of lemon zest, coarse ground peppercorns, fresh mint, rosemary, lavender, or ginger (diced or grated).
11. Once your jam has passed the drip test, turn your canning pot back up to high heat to return the water to a boil. Remove the saucepan from heat and ladle jam into your sterilized jars through the funnel, leaving a ½- to ¼-inch head-space between the surface of the jam and the top of the jar. Once the saucepan is empty, hand-tighten the lids and—very gently, using the tongs—return the full jars to the canning pot for their pressurizing water bath. This ensures a strong vacuum seal by forcing out extra air, which will keep your jam safe from bacterial or fungal invaders.
12. Store the jam in a cool dark place, and try not to eat it all immediately.



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*Perry's jams are available in Charlottesville at Feast, Albemarle Baking Company, Happy Cook, and Pollak Vineyards. Perry can usually be found offering samples and selling his jam at the Charlottesville City Market and the Forest Lakes Farmers Market.*