

Peach and Jalapeno Jelly

Adapted from Canning magazine. A special interest publication from Better Homes and Gardens

Makes 5 (half pint (8-ounce)) jars of jelly

*A couple of weeks ago, I made an impulse buy in the check-out line at the grocery store. **Better Homes and Gardens** had a special interest **Canning** publication. At \$10.00, it was about 10x as expensive as my usual gummy bear purchase, but it was worth it. All of the recipes are just begging to be made and I've been impressed that they are spot-on in terms of quantities. If you think canning can't be hip, I encourage you to pick up a copy. If it doesn't inspire, I'm not sure what will.*

2 lbs peaches (these should be just ripe with no blemishes)

4 fresh jalapeno chilies

1 cup apple cider vinegar (5% acidity)

5 cups granulated sugar

1 (3-ounce) foil package of liquid fruit pectin (found near the mason jars at your local grocery store)

Special equipment: boiling water canner with wire rack*, 5 (half pint (8-ounce)) canning jars**, ladle, jar lifter***, jar funnel, magnetic wand, spatula, gloves for jalapenos

Before you start the recipe, prepare your kitchen for canning. Clean and disinfect all countertops. Place the wire rack in the bottom of your boiling water canner* and place the mason jars (without their lids and wire rings) on the rack. Fill the boiling water canner with water (enough to cover the jars by 2-inches) and bring the water to a boil on the stove.

Fill a medium saucepan with water and add the lids (these need to be new, don't reuse old ones) and rings (these can be used multiple times). Bring the water to a low boil and allow to boil for 15 minutes to sterilize the rings and moisten the lids to enhance sealing. You can use a smaller saucepan for this step, but I prefer to have a larger pot so that I can add the boiling water to my boiling-water canner if the water level gets to low. Adding boiling water instead of cooler tap water means you don't waste time waiting for the water to return to boiling.

Once the boiling water canner is set-up, lay out a dish cloth next to the canner and place your ladle, jar funnel, jar lifter, spatula, and magnetic wand on this towel. All of your equipment should be washed before continuing.

To make the jelly, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Fill a large bowl with ice and water to make an ice water bath. Add the peaches to the boiling water and blanch until the skin starts to split (about 1 minute). Remove the peaches from the water using a slotted spoon or spider and plunge into the ice water bath to stop the cooking process. When the peaches are cool enough to handle, remove the skin using your fingers. If blanched for the appropriate amount of time, the skin should

peel back easily. Cut the peaches in half to remove the pits and then roughly chop them.

Wear gloves when preparing the jalapenos. For a spicier jelly, leave the seeds. For less spice, remove the veins of the jalapeno (the white strips that line the inside of the jalapeno) and the seeds. **Note:** I left about half of the seeds in for my first batch, but if I make it again I will leave all of the seeds. I like a spicy jelly!

Add the chopped peaches to a medium saucepan and smash with a potato masher until you get a chunky puree. Add the apple cider vinegar and the chopped jalapeno peppers (with their seeds if using). Bring to a boil over high heat then reduce the heat to medium-low and cover. Simmer for 20 minutes.

Transfer the mixture to a fine mesh strainer (I used a chinois mousseline) or a strainer lined with cheesecloth. Strain the mixture. You should have about 2 cups of strained liquid. Discard everything else.

Clean the medium saucepan and then combine the strained liquid and sugar in it. Bring to a boil over high heat and quickly stir in the pectin. Boil, whisking constantly (otherwise it may bubble over), for one minute, then remove from the heat. Skim off any foam using a metal spoon.

Check your boiling water canner to make sure that the water is boiling and that there is still enough water to cover the jars by 2-inches. If there is not enough water, add some water from the saucepan with your lids and rings. Return to a boil.

Remove the jars from the canner using your jar lifter. Pour any water back into the canner and set the sterilized jar on the clean towel. If using, place the jar funnel into a jar and ladle the hot jelly into the jar leaving a ¼-inch headspace (this refers to the space between the jelly and the lid). Slide a spatula down the insides of the jar to remove any air bubbles. Use a clean, damp cloth to wipe the rim of the jar (this removes any jelly that might prevent proper sealing) and use your magnetic wand to pull a lid and ring out of the saucepan where they have been simmering.

Place the lid on the jar and then twist on the ring until it is just finger-tight. You want it to be tight enough so that it doesn't fall off, but not so tight that air can't escape which will prevent a proper seal. I twist the seal until I just encounter resistance; I don't give it that final wrench that would seal it tight.

Repeat this process with the remaining 4 jars. If you find that you don't have enough jelly to completely fill your fifth jar, you can still process it as directed, but you'll want to refrigerate it immediately after it cools for best preservation. While seemingly insignificant, correct headspace is important for safe canning.

Once all the jars have been filled, use the jar lifter to place them in the boiling water canner. Be sure that all of the jars are standing straight up. Be careful when adding

and removing the jars that they don't tilt sideways as this can prevent the seal from forming properly.

Return the water in the boiling water canner to a boil. Process for 5 minutes; start timing when the water returns to a boil. Use the jar lifter to remove the jars from the boiling water canner and place them on a wire rack or a clean dishtowel to cool. **Water from the boiling water canner will remain atop the jars when they are removed from the canner. Don't tilt the jars to remove this. While bothersome, the water won't bother anything and will evaporate soon enough.**

You may hear the jars "pop" as they cool indicating that they have properly sealed. To double-check the seal, after the jellies have cooled for one hour, gently press the middle of the lid. If it flexes back and forth, the jar has not sealed and processing should be repeated for another five minutes. Allow the jellies to sit, untouched, on the wire rack for 24 hours. It may take up to 72 hours for the jellies to properly set.

Some final tips to keep in mind:

- Fearing botulism when I first started canning, I would over-process everything thinking more is better. Over-processing foods can alter their final texture and as such, it's important to process the jars just for the time indicated.
- Don't mess with proportions. Always use recipes from a reputable source and do your homework before making adjustments. Safe canning depends on proper acidity and little tweaks can result in unsafe products.
- Be sure to check your vinegar for proper acidity. Most canning recipes require that your vinegar be at least 5% acidity.

*While a boiling water canner allows you to can large batches at one time, you don't have to have one. You can use a large pot with a lid. Line the bottom of your large pot with extra rings from mason jars. Much like the wire rack, mason jars will rest atop the wire rings allowing for good heat circulation.

** The size of the jar matters. Always use the jar size specified in the recipe as processing times are based on the jar size.

*** A jar lifter makes it easy to remove hot jars, but tongs with rubber bands wrapped around each tip makes a worthy substitute.