

The Streamlined Canning Process

First off, just know that if you don't feel like canning jam, you don't have to. You can just store the finished jam in the refrigerator (in jars or even in Tupperware), where it will keep for many months. But if you're anything like me, there's no room in your refrigerator. Besides which, my method is nearly as easy and doesn't take much in the way of special equipment.

There is a lot of misinformation and contradictory information about preserving floating around in the world. My canning method looks different from what you usually see in North American books. Don't freak out! I'm going to explain to you why it works. If it still makes you feel weird, no problem. You can follow the traditional instructions given on page 21 for canning fruit butters (which don't get hot enough to use this streamlined method) and heat-process all the recipes in this book for 5 minutes (adjusting for altitude if necessary). Personally, though, I don't have the time to be messing around with the big pot of boiling water that canning often demands. That's right, we're dispensing with the whole boiling jars brouhaha! Hold up, though, you can **ONLY** use this method for jams, jellies, and marmalades. Let me explain.

Most canning recipes require you to boil your filled jars in a pot of boiling water for a specific amount of time, which is how long it will take for the very center of the jar to attain 212°F (100°C), at which point bacteria, yeast, mold, and enzymes (see page 7) are all killed or halted. This amount of time is determined through an algorithm that takes into account the size of the jar as well as the acidity, viscosity, and initial temperature of what's inside it. This is the method you



must follow when making canned fruit (like peach halves), pickles, salsa, chutney, and all that jazz.

The thing about jam, jelly, and marmalade, though, is they get so hot that they don't need sterilizing if they go into hot sterilized jars right away.

1. Preheat your oven to 250°F (121°C). Check that your oven is truthful by using an oven thermometer, so you know its real temperature to get that safe sterilization bang on.
2. Wash your jars if they've been sitting in the basement or you just brought them home from the thrift store. I don't thoroughly wash brand new jars. I just inspect them for material contamination (broken glass, hair . . . and once I found a folded-up \$5 bill!) and rinse them. If that weirds you out, though, feel free to wash them, of course. Either way, place them upside down (to avoid material contamination—just in case your oven is infested with bats!) on a cookie sheet and place them in the preheated oven at least 20 minutes before you'll need them. Keep them on the cookie sheet throughout the process so that you have a contained work area for easy cleanup and so the filled jars can be moved easily without disturbing them too much as they rest for 24 hours.

Have ring bands and new snap lids at the ready, but there's no need to prepare them in any way (unless you'd like to wash the snap lids). I know we used to heat them in hot water for 5 minutes, but I stopped doing that in 2013 after I saw a press release saying it was no longer necessary, and I've never had a problem. Besides, the lids will be sterilized by the hot jam itself.

3. When the jam is ready to be added to the jars (see page 23), turn off the heat, or turn the temperature down to low. For this method to be safe, the jam must still be above 194°F (90°C) for the entire process. Have an instant read thermometer handy to double check. Remove the baking sheet with the jars from the oven—onto a wire rack or tea towel if you're worried this might damage your countertop.
4. Fill the jars with jam to within ¼ to ⅛ inch of the rim. Use the measuring notches on the end of an air bubble remover or a regular ruler to check this if you like. The jam is hot enough that it will create a vacuum around itself and cause the jars to seal, but if they're underfilled they may not seal. I like to ladle my jam into a 2-liter (8-cup) measuring cup and pour it into the jars, using a spoon to wrangle any big pieces of fruit

if necessary, but you can also ladle it directly out of the pot and use a canning funnel to get it into the jars cleanly.

5. Wipe any jam drips off the rim with a clean wet cloth or paper towel, then screw on the lids as tightly as you can. Gardening gloves can be useful for this, as the jars are very hot, but I usually just grip the jar with a tea towel or the bottom of my apron (but it's true I have asbestos hands).
6. Invert the jars for 1 to 2 minutes, then flip right side up (otherwise the jam will set upside down) and allow to sit, undisturbed, at room temperature for 24 hours. Leaving them on the baking sheet is the easiest way to do this, but after a few hours they will be cool enough that you can transfer them to another surface if necessary.
7. Whether or not you heard the jars make that satisfying popping sound, check that they are sealed. The best way to check is to remove the ring band and then pick the jar up by the snap lid. Gravity doesn't lie! If you're feeling confident, you might also turn the jar upside down, which I call the Dairy Queen Blizzard Test. The vacuum is real. I carry jars around near and far with no ring bands and have yet to be sorry about it.

In fact, leave that ring band off when you store the jar—it will prolong the ring band's life by preventing rust, and on the off chance that something goes wrong it will be all the more apparent if the snap lid isn't being held on. Just remember to put it back on when you give away a jar as a gift—I often forget, but not everyone has a drawer full of ring bands, and seeing a jar of jam closed with an elastic band in a friend's refrigerator is so sad!

8. Put any unsealed jars in the refrigerator (it happens sometimes in spite of our best efforts). Label then store your sealed jars in a cool, dark, dry place like a cupboard, pantry, or cellar. See also *A Note on Shelf Life* (page 27).

The Traditional Canning Method (Necessary to Preserve Fruit Butters)

There are two fruit butters in this book (pages 132 and 145), and they need to be treated a little differently than the rest of the preserve recipes, as they don't cook in the same way and won't get quite as hot as the jams, jellies, and marmalades.

You can put them in the refrigerator straightaway, but the instructions are pretty simple for hot water bath canning them, so I encourage you to do so.