



Food Safety & Nutrition

Fruit Pie Fillings



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Commercially canned pie fillings are thickened with modified food starches that resist breaking or ‘thinning’ during heat processing. Fruit pie fillings thickened with regular cornstarch will not have the same consistency as canned filling made with modified food starch. In addition the heat penetration of products thickened with cornstarch is poor. Therefore WSU Extension does not recommend preserving pie fillings that have been thickened with cornstarch or tapioca.

But don’t despair; there is a recommended method for making great pie fillings that can be heat processed safely. The recipes use a modified food starch called Clear Jel®. This starch produces the correct thickening, even after the filling is canned and baked.

Clear Jel® is a corn starch derivative, and is a commercial thickening product used by bakeries and for frozen food. This product is used the same as flour or corn starch. Not only can it be used in preserved pie fillings but it can be used anywhere you would use flour or cornstarch as a thickener. It makes great clear gravy without the lumps, as well as puddings and sauces. It is used widely by bakeries and restaurants.

There are two types of Clear Jel®, “instant” and “regular”. “Instant” does not require heat to thicken. The product will thicken once the liquid is added. “Regular”, on the other hand, must be heated. When canning pie fillings, be sure to use the ‘regular’ Clear Jel® product.

Some advantages to using Clear Jel® is that it produces a clear color when cooked, it remains smooth, and the liquid doesn’t separate from the fruit after it has been frozen, canned or baked.

Clear Jel® can be used in pies that you are going to freeze or pie filling that you want to can and then make pies later. Just remember that frozen pies or pies made with the canned pie filling need to be baked before serving. If the fillings become “thin” during baking, increase the oven temperature, and shorten the baking time to prevent what is called “oven boil out”. This usually is caused by excessive baking at a temperature too low.

Each canned quart of fruit filling makes one 8-inch to 9-inch pie. Fillings may be used as toppings on desserts or pastries. Because the variety of fruit may alter the flavor of the fruit pie, we recommend that you first make a single quart, make a pie with it, and serve it. Then adjust the sugar or spices in the recipe to suit your personal preferences. The amount of lemon juice should not be altered, because it aids in ensuring the safety and storage stability of the fillings.

Sources of Clear Jel®

Clear Jel® is available locally at Wilco in Battleground or at the Decorette Shop in Portland. You can also order it on the web. The prices will vary as will the shipping and handling charges. Web sites to check include:

Below are recipes for the blueberry and cherry pie fillings. These can be made with the fresh berries we see at the fruit stands or you can freeze the berries or cherries and make the pie filling later. If you use frozen cherries or blueberries it is best if you use unsweetened fruit. But if sugar has been added, rinse it off while fruit is frozen. See note below the recipe for adjustments when using frozen berries.

For more information about preserving pie fillings or other pie filling recipes contact the WSU Extension office. Remember there are WSU Food Advisor available Monday- Friday 9am – noon to answer all your food preservation and food safety questions. Just call 397-6060 ext 0 to be referred to a Food Advisor.

Blueberry Pie Filling

Ingredient	1 quart	7 quarts
Fresh Blueberries	3 ½	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	¾ cup + 2 Tablespoons	6 cups
Clear Jel®	¼ cup + 1 Tablespoon	2 ¼ cups
Cold Water	1 cup	7 cups
Bottled lemon juice	3 ½ teaspoons	½ cup
Blue Food coloring	3 drops	20 drops
Red food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops

1. Wash and drain blueberries.
2. Combine sugar and Clear Jel® in a large saucepan. Stir.
3. Add water and if desired food coloring.
4. Cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble.
5. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly.
6. Remove from heat and fold in berries.
7. Fill jars immediately with mixture leaving 1 inch headspace and cover with a two-piece lid and ring.
8. Process in a boiling water bath canner for 30 minutes.
9. If using frozen unsweetened blueberries, thaw them and reserve the liquid to partially replace the water. Then adjust the Clear Jel® to ¼ cup for 1 quart and 1 ¾ cups for 7 quarts.

Cherry Pie Filling

Ingredient	1-quart	7-quarts
Fresh Sour Cherries	3 1/3 cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear Jel®	¼ cup + 1 tablespoon	1 ¾ cups
Cold water	1 1/3 cups	9 1/3 cups
Bottled Lemon juice	1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon	½ cup
Cinnamon (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Almond extract (optional)	¼ teaspoon	2 teaspoons
Red rood coloring (optional)	6 drops	¼ teaspoon

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1. Rinse and pit cherries, and hold in cold water.
 2. To prevent stem-end browning, hold pitted cherries in water containing 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid crystals or six 500 mg vitamin C tablets crushed in 1 gallon of water.
 3. Combine sugar, Clear Jel® and cinnamon, if desired, in a large saucepan.
 4. Add water, food coloring and almond extract, if desired.
 5. Stir mixture and cook over medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble.
 6. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly.
 7. Take off the heat and fold in cherries.
 8. Fill jars immediately with mixture leaving 1-inch headspace.
 9. Wipe rim of the jar, place two piece lids on and place in water bath canner.
 10. Process immediately for 30 minutes.
 11. If using frozen unsweetened cherries, thaw them collecting the liquid. Use the collected liquid to partially replace the water in the recipe. Also adjust the amount of Clear Jel® to ¼ cup for 1 quart and 1 ¾ cup for 7-quarts.
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