

## Successful jam-making

- Always use fruit that is in peak condition, preferably slightly under ripe - the pectin content will be at its best. Over-ripe or damaged fruit is not ideal - the pectin has begun to change to pectose and the jam will not set well. The result is likely to deteriorate rapidly.
- Jam jars need to be very clean. To sterilise jars, wash in soapy water, rinse well and then place in a cool oven - 130C/250F/Gas ½ - for 15-20 minutes.
- Use the correct amount of sugar as indicated. The sugar reacts with the pectin to set the jam.
- The amount of sugar you need depends on the amount of pectin in a fruit, but generally, the fruit to sugar ratio for traditional jams is 450g (1lb) sugar to 450g (1lb) fruit. The sugar content is sometimes a little higher or lower depending on pectin and acid content. Very acidic fruits such as blackcurrants have good pectin content - these can take an extra 50 to 100g of sugar to get a really juicy jam. Fruit such as strawberry - lower in pectin, but also much sweeter - can take the usual amount or possibly a little less.
- Use coarse-grain sugar such as preserving or granulated - this ensures a good clear jam. Coarse grains dissolve more slowly and evenly giving a better result. Fine sugars dissolve less easily and are usually more expensive too.
- Don't add water when cooking fruits already high in sugar, such as strawberries, raspberries and blackberries.

- Don't overboil the preserve. Once the sugar is added it usually takes a fairly short period of time to reach setting point, as long as the pectin content is good. To test for setting, put a spoonful of the jam on a cool plate and put into the fridge for a few minutes. After that time the jam or jelly will form a wrinkly skin if it is ready.
- Always cover the jam immediately it has been poured into the jars as this gives a good seal and prevents mildew appearing on the surface.
- Always store preserves in a cool, dry area, away from direct sunlight, and use within the year.

Know the pectin content of the fruit used - the higher the pectin content, the better the set. If you use fruit with a low pectin content, try adding some fruit with high pectin content such as apples, damsons or redcurrants to give a good result. Alternatively, commercial pectin can be added to low-pectin fruits to ensure a good set. Pectin is best added to the fruit before the addition of the sugar.

**High-pectin fruits:** blackcurrants, redcurrants, cooking apples, damsons, quinces, gooseberries and some plums.

**Low-pectin fruits:** blackberries, cherries, elderberries, pears, rhubarb, strawberries and medlars.