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DRAAISEISOEN

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HOME-MADE TOMATO JAM

by Theresa Siebert



Jam is a product made from whole fruit, pieces of fruit, fruit pulp or fruit puree. Tomato jam is produced from green or ripe tomatoes.

INGREDIENT SELECTION FOR TOMATO JAM

Green tomatoes

The tomatoes are picked at full size, just prior to turning colour. The produce should be free from rot or disease; minor blemishes are acceptable as these are easily trimmed away.

Ripe tomatoes

The tomatoes are picked in the firm-ripe stage. Selective hand picking enables the fruit to be sorted in the field and any sun-burnt, overripe, or infected tomatoes should be discarded.

Sugar

Cane sugar is usually used in a ratio of 1:1 with the fruit on a mass basis. Corn, or glucose, syrup may be used to replace a portion of the sugar. It has the advantage of preventing sugar crystallisation, improving texture and enhancing smoothness, while ensuring better colour retention during processing, as well as providing a pleasing level of sweetness. Corn syrup can be substituted for sugar where 0.57kg of corn syrup can replace 0.45kg sugar.

Optional additions

Other fruits, such as green apple, blend very well with tomatoes while passion fruit make for an interesting blend with ripe tomatoes. Spices such as ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon can be used to spice up green tomato jam.

Acids

The optimum pH for obtaining the perfect gel is between pH 3-3.5. If the fruit is not acidic enough, acids in the form of vinegar, lemon juice, lime juice, fumaric acid, citric acid, malic acid, tartaric acid or combinations thereof may be added towards the end of the cooking process. Lemon juice is rich in acid and pectin, which are two very necessary components of a jam. It may be necessary to add a small quantity of lemon juice to ripe tomatoes that may be lacking in one or both components to ensure a good gel formation.

WASHING OF TOMATOES

Washing is necessary to remove soil, dirt, spray residues and fruit fly eggs and larvae. Soaking the tomatoes prior to washing loosens dirt and residue, making the washing process more effective. A soaking period of 3 minutes in water at 54°C is considered ideal.

CHOPPING

The tomatoes and other fruit ingredients are chopped by hand. The size of the fruit pieces will greatly affect the consistency of the end product.

COOKING

The chopped fruit is placed in a large saucepan and heated over a low heat until soft and pulpy (approximately 30 minutes). The remaining ingredients are then added and stirred continuously over low heat until all the sugar has dissolved. The mixture is brought to boil and left uncovered until the jam starts to thicken. Occasional stirring is required.

TESTING

As soon as the jam starts to thicken, a spoonful of jam is scooped from the pot and placed on a chilled saucer, which is then placed in a freezer until the jam sample has reached room temperature. If the cooked sample has gelled to form the desired consistency, the jam is ready and cooking is stopped. If not, continue cooking and repeat the test after 10 minutes.

STERILIZATION OF JARS

The glass jars used for the preservation of the jam should be of high quality, without any cracks or chips and should form tight seals. Any of the following sterilization methods can be used:

- Oven method: The clean jars are placed upright in a cold oven, allowing an even spacing between the jars. The temperature is set on 160°C and the jars are left for a minimum of 30 minutes in the oven. The hot bottles are removed using gloves or tongs.
- Boiling method: The clean jars are placed lying down in a deep pot and covered with cold water. The water is brought to boil. After 10 minutes of boiling, the jars are removed using gloves and tongs. The jars are placed upright on a wooden board, ready to be filled.
- Steam method: Jars can be sterilized by saturating the interior with steam. This can be done by simply holding the open neck of the jar over the spout of a steam generator, water boiler or even a kettle for 1 minute. Tongs or clamps are necessary to handle the hot jars.

NB: Take note that as a general rule, hot food goes into hot jars and cold food goes into cold jars.

FILLING AND SEALING OF JARS

The hot, sterilised jars are filled to the brim with jam. This is important since the hot jam shrinks upon cooling. The filled jars are left to cool before they are sealed with suitable, tight-fitting lids. Metal lids are generally not suitable since the high acid content would cause corrosion of the metal, leaving the product inedible. Specially lined or lacquered lids are required.



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