

Title:

Strawberry Jamming Finale

Word Count:

711

Summary:

So the strawberries are finally slowing down, the end of the season is in sight... and do I feel relief that I will no longer be chained to the kitchen counter, three nights a week, preparing strawberries for jam? Am I sick of the sight of them, turning into one myself, in a word, jaded? Surprisingly enough I'm not. Six weeks of making jam and I could carry on longer.

Keywords:

strawberry jam,apricot jam,recipes

Article Body:

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I sneak into the larder to count the jars...have I sold too many? Will it be enough for the family for the year and what about Christmas presents? Two weeks ago I was merrily flogging it at the market, secure in the knowledge I could make more. Now friends are ringing up asking to buy jam and I'm grudgingly parting with it but the Scrooge hoarding instinct is kicking in, a sure sign of the end of the season.

And I never did master the thick jam versus runny jam dilemma, the jam decided for itself what it would become, not me. So I cannot yet claim to be a professional jam maker, not when the jam is in charge of the process. Further experiments will have to wait until next year, when at the beginning of the new season I can afford to be lavish with the strawberries and if a batch burns in the attempt to thicken it won't be a disaster, I'll be able to use it for baking jam squares, where the caramel overtones are a bonus.

Part of the magic of strawberries is their cheerful colour as well as their scent. I'm going to miss the piles of fruit on the table, waiting to be sorted for selling, in the fridge in punnets, to be delivered in the morning, bowls of

seconds for the family to eat and containers of the rest for jam. The youngberries will be starting soon, like blackberries, they have their own allure and make great summer puddings, but they just don't quite have that special something that strawberries have...!

So what will I fill my jars with now? Well the good news is that apricots are just starting to creep into the shops. Unfortunately we only have one tree and this year it has very little fruit on it, we need to plant some more trees but it will be a few years before they produce properly.

So we check out the fruit in the shops. It's a bit like playing the stock market. We're waiting for the price to come down, to buy loads and jam them all, but if we wait too long and misjudge the timing the price will shoot up again or there'll be none left, it's a short season. So perhaps I'll play it safe and buy a couple of kilos next week and then hope to splurge the week after on 5 kilos as cheap as can be, but I can't risk being caught short of apricot jam. We're on our last jar of last year's and there'll be a family uprising if I don't get in next year's supply.

The apricot jam recipe - very similar to the strawberry jam recipe but less temperamental. The worst I've managed to do has been burn it and even then it was usable in baking, just a slight caramel added flavour!

1 kg apricots halved and stoned
750g sugar

Pack fruit and sugar in a stainless steel or enamel pan and keep in fridge overnight. Heat slowly, stirring occasionally until the sugar has dissolved. Turn up the heat a bit and boil rapidly (stir occasionally to prevent burning) for about 20-30 mins. Test a drop on a cold plate. If, after 2 minutes, when you push your fingernail through it, the skin wrinkles, it is done. If not test every 5 minutes till it does. Pour into hot sterilised jam jars and seal immediately.

NB apricots have plenty of pectin, so you don't need to add lemon juice to get the set.

For more tips on jam making and the strawberry jam recipe, look at my article Strawberry Jamming Again.

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