

Title:

Strawberry Jamming Again

Word Count:

957

Summary:

So I'm preparing strawberries for jam, the third evening this week. It is the most productive week of the year as far as our strawberries are concerned. The best are already sold, fresh in punnets and the seconds, some with scarcely a blemish, others hideously deformed but still flavoursome, are piled in heaps waiting to be hulled, halved, weighed and jammed.

Keywords:

strawberry jam, jam, recipes, strawberries

Article Body:

More practical musings - hints and tips on making strawberry jam.  
Sunshine for the rest of the year

So I'm preparing strawberries for jam, the third evening this week. It is the most productive week of the year as far as our strawberries are concerned. The best are already sold, fresh in punnets and the seconds, some with scarcely a blemish, others hideously deformed but still flavoursome, are piled in heaps waiting to be hulled, halved, weighed and jammed.

Just taking part in this process, I feel a bond back through the centuries with all the women, who preserved, jammed, pickled, prolonging the goodness and abundance of the seasonal produce to last the whole year through. In the days before fridges, freezers, supermarkets, intercontinental fast transport, each household would have relied on itself to survive the winter without diseases caused by vitamin deficiency and lack of sunshine. Making jam wasn't just a luxury sweet, it was a way of preserving the summer sunshine a little longer, of giving your children some vitamins to keep them strong, when the only things growing in the garden were cabbage or Brussels sprouts! I wonder if those children ate them without fuss? Your preserves would have been eked out to last until spring brought new fresh growth with it.

Our jam supplies usually just last through until the next strawberry season. I'm generous to start with, giving it away as presents to friends, selling it at the market for our school, then, strawberry season over, I count the jars and begin

to get more parsimonious. After all bought jam is now unheard of in the family, I'm the only one who eats marmalade, which fills the winter jam gap, so the strawberry and apricot jam has got to last, come what may.

My strawberry jam recipe for success? ( and please note that this is just how I make it... I'm not an expert and don't even have a jam thermometer, but I guess they didn't in the old days either. These are just hints and tips gathered from making my own mistakes and from the advice of my sister-in-law.)

Extremely simple ingredients, but results vary wildly from the runny (running right off your toast runny) to the thick (spoon stands up in it) for no apparent reason - well the length of time cooking together with the amount of pectin are the reasons but you can't always tell about the pectin in advance. Strawberries are very low in pectin, which is what makes jam set and the riper they are the less there is. If they are wet that also dilutes the pectin (let them dry on kitchen towel or a dishcloth before preparing). So something needs to be added. I usually add lemon juice, which doesn't affect the flavour, you can also buy pectin in packets. The more lemon juice you use , the more likely it is to set firm - I like mine a bit runny, so tend to juggle the lemon juice a bit.

1 kg prepared strawberries

750g sugar

25ml-50ml lemon juice or more if it doesn't set!

Use a large thick based pan. The strawberries should only come to about half way up or they will boil merrily over, coating your stove with sticky foam. Let the strawberries soak with the sugar overnight. This brings out the juice and keeps the fruit firmer so it doesn't dissolve into a mush when cooked. Bring slowly to the boil, stirring occasionally to make sure the sugar dissolves before it boils. Then add the lemon juice. Boil at a moderate pace, without stirring, for at least half an hour before testing.

The main thing is to keep your jam under observation after the first half hour of boiling and sniff( to make sure it's not burning on the bottom of the pan), test every 5 minutes with a drop on a cold plate. Let it cool for a couple of minutes. If it starts feeling syrupy and makes a string to your finger when you dip it, then that's a good runny, syrupy jam. If a skin forms and wrinkles when you push your finger through the drop of jam then it's a firmer set. If after an hour it still doesn't get to either of those stages you might have to add more lemon juice and boil it up again for another twenty minutes or so then start testing all over again. You can tell if it is getting there as the bubbles start looking more syrupy, a slower rolling boil.

Have your jars ready. 1kg of fruit makes about three medium sized jars. I

usually sterilise mine by pouring boiling water into clean, dry jars up to the top (they must be dry though, if there are drops of cold water in they can crack). Then when the jam is ready, pour out the hot water and ladle in the jam, right to the top, put on a circle of either waxed or baking paper and then the lid. Tighten the lid now while it's hot for a good seal. The spills of jam are easier to wipe off while it's still hot too, hold with a cloth though, hot is really HOT!

If all this is sounding a bit laborious, you can always try waiting for the apricot season. Apricots are far less temperamental, have plenty of pectin and set more easily.... But hey.. strawberries are worth the effort and it's mainly patience you need, not technique. There is a huge satisfaction from seeing the jars lined up on the shelf, to see you through the winter. Good luck!

Copyright Kit Heathcock