Welcome to the first issue of Quality for Keeps for 2011! We look forward to another year of bringing you the latest and safest USDA-based information and answering your questions.

When the growing season for strawberries is unusually wet, even the most perfectly prepared strawberry jam may yield a product that will not set up properly.

Strawberries are especially affected by heavy rains. Heavy rain while strawberries are on the vine will cause them to be very high in water. This could result in a weak gel formation.

Strawberries do not continue to ripen after being picked. They must be picked at the peak of ripeness for best flavor. Cool nights and sunny days increase sugar content in strawberries, thus increasing flavor and sweetness of the berry.

Keep strawberries cool—from picking until time of use. Heat makes berries soft and easy to bruise. When picking berries, gather them in the morning when it is cooler. Keep picked berries out of the sunshine. Refrigerate berries as soon as possible. Store loosely covered.

**Preparation.** Don’t wash berries until ready to use or freeze them. Rinse with cool water. Don’t soak berries. Wash small amounts of berries at a time, exposing berries to water for a shorter period of time. Leave caps on strawberries while washing them to prevent excessive water from soaking into the berry.

For successful strawberry jam, choose a recipe that uses both pectin and added lemon juice. Follow the recipe printed on the inside of the box of pectin.

If strawberry jam fails, enjoy as a delicious topping for pancakes, cheesecake or ice cream; or attempt to remake jam using added pectin.

**Remaking soft jellies.** Measure jelly to be re-cooked. Work with no more than 4 to 6 cups at a time. Before starting, read GH1461 *Jam and Jelly Basics:* [http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/ hesguide/foodnut/ gh1461.pdf](http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/ hesguide/foodnut/ gh1461.pdf).

To remake with powdered pectin. For each quart of jelly, mix ¼-cup sugar, ½-cup water, 2 tablespoons bottled lemon juice, and 4 teaspoons powdered pectin. Bring to a boil while stirring. Add jelly and bring to a rolling boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Boil hard for 30 seconds. Remove from heat, quickly skim foam off jelly, and fill sterile jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Adjust new lids and process as recommended.

To remake with liquid pectin. For each quart of jelly, measure ¾-cup sugar, 2 tablespoons bottled lemon juice, and 2 tablespoons liquid pectin. Bring jelly only to boil over high heat, while stirring. Remove from heat and quickly add the sugar, lemon juice, and pectin. Bring to a full rolling boil, stirring constantly. Boil hard for 1 minute. Quickly skim off foam and fill sterile jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Adjust new lids and process as recommended.

To remake without added pectin. For each quart of jelly, add 2 tablespoons bottled lemon juice. Heat to boiling and boil for 3 to 4 minutes. Use one of the tests described in *Jam and Jelly Basics* to determine jelly doneness. Remove from heat, quickly skim off foam, and fill sterile jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Adjust new lids and process as recommended in *Jam and Jelly Basics*.

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How to Tips

Dried Strawberries add delight to granola, cereal, and snacks

When strawberries are plentiful and the freezer is stuffed with freezer jam and frozen strawberries, dry a few batches of strawberries to add to granola and trail mix. Strawberries are fair to good candidates for drying. Strawberries are best dried in a food dehydrator. A food dehydrator can maintain a low, even temperature, and circulate the air with a fan, or blower.

Wash and sort fruit, removing caps. Sweeter berry varieties with a full red color and firm texture dry best. Strawberries may be sliced (1/4-inch), halved, left whole if small, or pureed. Sliced berries dry more evenly than whole berries.

Drying. To successfully dry strawberries, keep the temperature between 135° to 140°F. If temperature is too low, (less than 90°F), berries will dry too slow, and will mold. If temperature is too high, (over 170°F.), berries will cook, or harden on the outside, leaving the inside moist and open to spoilage.

Set dehydrator temperature to 135°-140°F. If dehydrator does not have a thermostat, purchase an inexpensive thermometer and place in the bottom tray.

Place strawberries on drying tray, cut side up and in a single layer. Pieces should not touch or overlap. Leave 1 to 2 inches of space between trays in dehydrator for proper air circulation. It may be necessary to turn berries and rotate the rack’s position up and down in dehydrator during drying process. Continue drying berries until they “test” dry.

Watch strawberries closely toward end of drying process, since food dries quickly and scorches easily near the end. Remove individual strawberry pieces as they dry.

The time it takes to dry strawberries depends on their initial moisture content, volume being dried, size and thickness of pieces, air’s humidity, and ability of the dehydrator. Strawberry slices may take 7 to 15 hours to dry, while whole berries may take 24 to 36 hours depending on the size of the pieces and the individual dehydrator used.

To test for dryness, remove several pieces from dehydrator and allow to cool. Cut pieces in half. When folded in half, it should not stick to itself.

Cool fruit for 30 minutes before packaging. Packing while warm may lead to moisture in the package. Waiting too long, allows fruit to reabsorb moisture from the air.

Conditioning. Strawberries pieced are a variety of sizes, which means pieces will have different amounts of moisture. Since strawberries are eaten dried rather than rehydrated, do not dry until brittle. Conditioning insures all pieces have the same amount of moisture. This reduces the risk of mold growth.

To condition, pack dried berries loosely in clean plastic or glass jars. Seal and allow to stand for 7 to 10 days. Excess moisture will be absorbed by drier pieces. Shake jars daily to separate pieces. Check for water condensation. If moisture appears in the jar, return pieces to dehydrator for further drying.

After conditioning, package and store fruit in sealed plastic bags, or airtight jars. Pack tightly in containers, removing as much air as possible; store in a dark, cool place (60°F) for up to one year. For longer storage, store packaged dried strawberries in freezer; use within two years.

Check products occasionally during storage for dryness. If products become moist, re-dry or use immediately. If spoiled, or molding, discard.

Source: Penn State, Let’s Preserve Newsletter May-June 2008
http://lancaster.extension.psu.edu/nutrition/LetsPreserveNewsletters/LP2008/1MayJune.pdf

Food Preservation Workshops and Demonstrations

Tuesdays—June 14, 21, 28 & July 12 & 19
6:30 to 9:00 pm
Union Memorial Auditorium, classroom 3 (lower level)
Cost: $7 each or all 5 for $25

June 14—Canning Vegetables & Fruit
June 21—Freezing Vegetables, Fruit & Prepared Foods
June 28—Preparing Jams & Jellies
July 12—Preparing Pickles & Relishes
July 19—Preparing Salsa

For more information, or for a free brochure, please contact: University of Missouri Extension 636-583-5141, or visit our website: http://extension.missour.edu/franklin
Storing home-canned jams and jellies

Q: How long can I keep my homemade jams and jellies on the shelf?

A: For best quality, all home-canned foods should be used within a year. Most homemade jams and jellies, that use a tested recipe, and have been processed in a canner for the recommended time, should retain both quality and flavor for one year.

Storage. Home-canned foods should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place, between 50–70°F. However, over extended periods of time, the color, flavor, texture, and nutrient content of home-canned jams and jellies may change. A typical full-sugar fruit jam, or jelly, should be safe to eat if the jar seal remains intact and the product shows no visible signs of spoilage from molds or yeasts.

Some jams and jellies may have a shorter shelf-life than others. For example, lighter-colored jams and jellies may darken faster than others and not remain appealing for a whole year. Though this is not a safety concern, fading may reduce the jam’s visual appeal.

Reduced-sugar jams and jellies may deteriorate in color and texture more quickly as they lack the full preservative effects of the sugar. Some fruit jams may darken or lose flavor more quickly when made with less sugar.

Freezer/refrigerator jams and jellies are a distinct category of products that have to be stored in the refrigerator, (usually up to 3 weeks), or frozen for up to a year.

Q: How long can I keep my homemade jams and jellies once I open them?

A: Opened home-canned jams and jellies should be kept in the refrigerator at 40°F or lower. “Regular” – or pectin-added, full-sugar – cooked jams and jellies are best stored for 1 month in the refrigerator after opening. They may last longer depending on the specific product and how it is used.

Shelf-life is shortened by keeping the container frequently open and/or at room temperature for long periods of time during use.

Examine the container regularly during storage for any signs of spoilage, like molds, yeasts and off odors, (including a fermented, “yeasty’,” or “alcohol” odor), once it is opened. Discard the entire contents of the container if these are detected.

Lower-sugar or no-sugar-added spreads may have a shorter refrigerated shelf-life than those made with traditional amounts of sugar. Natural flavor changes in the fruit base are more noticeable without the sugar to mask them; for example, some lower-sugar spreads may taste more tart or acidic over time. Light-colored spreads may also darken more quickly with less added sugar.

Store freezer jams in the refrigerator after thawing for up to 3 to 4 weeks after opening. Freezer jams are subject to more syneresis, (“weeping” or separation of liquid from the gel), than cooked jams and jellies.

Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation, October 2005.

Where Does Your Food Come From? Eat Local!

For the freshest produce, buy at local farmer’s markets or community markets. Farmer’s markets provide an effective marketing system for the producer or farmer. The producers are often part-time, retired, or hobby gardeners looking to supplement their incomes.

Farmer’s markets are much more than just a place to sell food. They are a venue for socializing, where urban residents meet farmers. Consumers benefit by receiving fresh, high quality products and the opportunity to directly interact with the producers.

A large majority of people don’t bat an eye at the sight of strawberries, or perfect tomatoes in winter. In the space of a generation, we’ve become accustomed to eating food that’s never grown roots in local soil. In fact, most produce grown and food produced in the United States travels an average of 1,500 miles before it reaches your dinner plate.

For greatest freshness and quality, buy local. Lists of local farmers and farmers markets can be found in the 2011 To Market . . . . To Market, a guide to locally grown food in the St. Louis Bi-State area:
http://extension.missouri.edu/ecregion/market/index.shtml
Strawberry Freezer Jam

- 4 cups crushed strawberries (about 4, 1-lb. containers of fresh strawberries, or 3, 12-oz. bags of unsweetened frozen strawberries)
- 1-1/2 cups sugar or Splenda®
- 1 package (1.59 oz.) Ball®, No Cook Freezer Jam Fruit Pectin

Stir sugar and contents of package in a bowl until well blended. Stir in 4 cups crushed strawberries. Stir 3 minutes longer. Ladle jam into clean jars to fill line. Twist on lids. Let stand until thickened at room temperature, about 30 minutes. Store in freezer for up to 1 year, or in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks.

Yield: about 5 half-pint jars

Source: Ball®, No Cook Freezer Jam Fruit Pectin

Note: Brand names are mentioned for educational purposes only and do not imply endorsement.