



Preserving Foods: Cherries

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Cherries have been eaten and enjoyed since prehistoric times. They were probably cultivated first in Asia Minor but people enjoyed the wild fruit long before that. Cherry pits have been found in Stone Age caves in Europe and prehistoric cliff dwellings in America.

Cherries can be divided into two main groups: sweet and sour. The sweet varieties come in dark or light colors. Bing, Lamberts, Van, Black Republican and Black Tartarian are common varieties of dark cherries. Royal Ann and Rainer are popular light sweet cherries. Sweet cherries are great eaten fresh, canned, dried and brandied. Popular varieties of sour cherries are Montmorency, North Star and Meteor. Sour cherries are used in pies, cobblers, jam, jellies, preserves, and sauces and also dried.

Selection and Handling

Cherries should have a bright, glossy plump appearance and fresh-looking stems. Avoid soft cherries or any with brown discoloration. With the exception of the light sweet cherries, dark color is the best indication of good flavor. Handle fresh cherries carefully. They will last longer fresh if stems are left on and the cherries are refrigerated.

Canning

It will take 2 to 2 ½ pounds of cherries for each quart of canned fruit desired.

Wash and stem cherries. Remove pits if desired or can with pits in. Cherries may be canned in water, sugar syrup, or juice such as apple or white grape. For a 9-pint load use the following proportions:



<u>Type of syrup</u>	<u>Cups water</u>	<u>Cups sugar</u>
Very light	6½	¾
Light	5¾	1½
Medium	5¼	2¼
Heavy	5	3¼



Hot Pack

In a large sauce pan, add ½ cup water, juice or syrup for each quart of cherries. Bring to a boil. Pack heated cherries into jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Fill jars with hot liquid to ½ inch from top. Remove air bubbles with a plastic knife. Wipe rim, adjust lids and process in a boiling water canner. Pints: 15 minutes; Quarts: 20 minutes. After processing, take canner off heat. Remove lid and wait 5 minutes before removing jars.

Raw Pack

Pack cherries tightly into jars to ½ inch from top. Add hot liquid to jar leaving ½ inch headspace. Remove air bubbles with a plastic knife. Wipe rims and adjust lids. Process in a boiling water canner, pints and quarts: 25 minutes. After processing, take canner off heat. Remove lid and wait 5 minutes before removing jars.

Cherry Pie Filling

	<u>1 Quart</u>	<u>7 Quarts</u>
Fresh sour cherries	3 ¹ / ₃ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear-Jel	¼ cup + 1 Tbsp.	1¾ cups
Cinnamon (optional)	1 ¹ / ₈ tsp.	1 tsp.
Cold water or fruit juice***	1 ¹ / ₃ cups	9 ¹ / ₃ cups
Almond extract (optional)	¼ tsp.	2 tsp.
Red food coloring (optional)	6 drops	¼ tsp.
Bottled lemon juice	1 Tbsp. + 1 tsp.	½ cup

***Using a cherry or berry juice in place of water will make for a fruitier flavored filling.

Rinse and pit cherries. Combine sugar, Clear-Jel, and cinnamon (if desired) in a large saucepan. Stir. Add water or juice, almond extract, and food coloring (if desired). Stir mixture and cook over medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in cherries. Fill quart jars, leaving 1 inch headspace. Process immediately: 30 minutes (0-1,000 feet), 35 minutes (1,100-3,000 feet), or 40 minutes (3,001-6,000 feet). After processing, take canner off heat. Remove lid and wait 5 minutes before removing jars.

Freezing

Cherries – Sweet

Dark cherries are best for freezing. Wash, stem and pit if desired. Cherries can be frozen individually on a cookie sheet and then repackaged into freezer bags or containers. They can also be frozen in syrup or juice pack. Add ascorbic acid to syrup or juice mix to help prevent browning. Seal, label and freeze.

Frozen Cherry Snack Pack

Leave stems and pits in cherries. Wash and air-dry cherries. Place on cookie sheet and freeze until solid. Remove from freezer and package small freezer bags or small snack sized freezer containers. Label and refreeze. Eat while still frozen. Note: May be packaged without stems.

Cherries – Sour

Select bright red, tree ripened cherries. Wash, stem and pit. Pack cherries into freezer containers and cover with sugar syrup or fruit juice. Cherries can also be sprinkled with sugar. Let sit for 15 minutes to make its own juice and pack into freezer containers. Seal, label and freeze.

Drying

Both sweet and sour cherries are great for drying. They can be used as a snack or in baked products and fruit soups. Sour cherries can be rehydrated for pies and cobblers.

Select fully ripe fruit. Wash, stem and pit. Large cherries can be cut in half for drying.

Place on dehydrator screens and dry until pliable and leathery with no pockets of moisture.

Jams, Jellies, and Preserves

Both sweet and sour cherries make excellent jam, jellies and preserves. There are many excellent recipes in pectin packages and home canning books for both regular and low sugar spreads.

Source: Family Food Education Program