



Food Safety & Preservation: Fruit Pie Fillings

SP 50-616, Revised February 2019

Canned fruit fillings are a time saver for year around pie making. The fillings may also be used as toppings on desserts. Pie fillings in this fact sheet are thickened with Clear-Jel, a waxy cornstarch that has been chemically modified to produce a good consistency even after canning and baking. Other available household starches (such as flour, cornstarch or tapioca) tend to become runny. Ask your county Extension office about the availability of regular (not instant) Clear-Jel in your area.

Each canned quart of filling makes one 8-inch or 9-inch pie. Because the variety of fruit may alter the flavor of the pie, do a trial run first. Make a single quart of filling and make a pie. Then adjust the sugar and spices in the recipe to suit your personal preferences. Do not change the amount of lemon juice, it helps control the safety and storage stability of the fillings.

There is approximately 3 cups of Clear-Jel per pound.

When possible, use fresh fruit for making fillings. If frozen fruit is used it must be completely thawed before adding to the filling. Using unthawed fruit can result in an unsafe product. It is best to use unsweetened fruit. If sugar has been added, estimate the amount of sugar added before freezing and adjust the recipe for sweetness. Collect, measure, and use juice from thawing fruit to replace the water specified in the recipe and reduce Clear-Jel to ¼ cup for a quart and 1¾ cup for 7 quarts.

Blanching Step:

It is recommended that all fresh fruit except fragile berries such as black berries used in making canned fruit pie fillings go through a quick heating step to drive the air out of the fruit which will result in less siphoning of the product when canned.

To Blanch: In a large pan bring 1 gallon water to a boil. Place no more than 6 cups of fresh prepared fruit in a basket and place in boiling water. Return water to a boil and gently boil 1 minute. Immediately remove from water, drain and keep blanched fruit in a covered container to keep warm while blanching additional fruit. When the recommended amount of fruit has been blanched fold immediately into hot clear-jel mixture.

Blueberry Pie Filling

	Quantities of Ingredients Needed for	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh blueberries	3½ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	¾ cup + 2 Tbsp.	6 cups
Clear-Jel	¼ cup + 1 Tbsp.	2¼ cups
Cold water or fruit juice*	1-1/3 cup	9-1/3 cups
Red food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops
Blue food coloring (optional)	3 drops	20 drops
Bottled lemon juice	3½ tsp.	½ cup

Quality - Select sweet, very ripe but firm, deep blue fruit. If using frozen blueberries they must be completely thawed before adding to the pie filling. (see third paragraph on page 1)

Procedure - Wash and drain blueberries. Blanch berries following instructions on page 1. Combine sugar and Clear-Jel in a large kettle. Stir. Add water or juice, if desired; add food coloring. Cook on medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in berries. Fill pint or quart jars, leaving 1 inch headspace. Process immediately (see Canning pg. 4).

*Water can be replaced by berry or grape juice for a more fruit flavored filling.

Apple Pie Filling

	Quantities of Ingredients Needed for	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh sliced apples (blanched)	3½ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	¾ cup + 2 Tbsp.	5½ cups
Clear-Jel	¼ cup	1½ cups
Cinnamon	½ tsp.	1 Tbsp.
Nutmeg (optional)	⅛ tsp.	1 tsp.
Cold water or fruit juice*	½ cup	2½ cups
Apple juice	¾ cup	5 cups
Yellow food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops
Bottled lemon juice	2 Tbsp.	¾ cup

Quality - Use firm, crisp apples. Golden Delicious, Gravenstein, Granny Smith or Jonathan and other varieties of cooking apples are suitable. If apples lack tartness, use an additional ¼ cup of lemon juice for each 6 quarts of slices. If using frozen apple slices they must be completely thawed before adding to pie filling. (see third paragraph on page 1)

Procedure - Wash, peel, and core apples. Cut slices ½ inch wide and place in water to cover containing 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or 6 crushed 500 mg vitamin C tablets. Blanch apple slices following instructions on page 1. Combine sugar, Clear-Jel, and cinnamon in a large kettle with water and/or apple juice. If desired, food coloring and nutmeg may be added. Stir and cook on medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained apple slices immediately. Fill pint or quart jars without delay, leaving 1-½ inch headspace. Adjust lids and process immediately (see Canning pg. 4).

*Water can be replaced with apple juice for a more apple flavored filling.

Cherry Pie Filling (Blackberry Pie Filling)**

	Quantities of Ingredients Needed for	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh sour cherries	3½ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear-Jel	¼ cup + 1 Tbsp.	1¾ cups
Cinnamon (optional)	⅛ tsp.	1 tsp.
Cold water or fruit juice***	1½ cups	9½ 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

Quality - Select very ripe, firm, tart cherries. If using frozen cherries or berries, if using frozen cherries or berries they must be completely thawed before adding to pie filling. (see third paragraph on page 1.)

Procedure - Rinse and pit cherries. To prevent stem end browning, hold pitted cherries in water containing 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or 6 crushed 500 mg vitamin C tablets in 1 gallon of water. Blanch cherries and berries following instructions on page 1. 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 (see Canning pg. 4).

**The Cherry Pie Filling recipe can be used with blackberries. More sugar may be required for tart berries. When making berry filling, omit the cinnamon, almond extract and food coloring.

***Water can be replaced with cherry or berry juice for a more fruit flavored filling.

Peach Pie Filling

	Quantities of Ingredients Needed for	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh sliced peaches	3½ cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
Clear-Jel	¼ cup + 1 Tbsp.	2 cups + 3 Tbsp.
Cinnamon (optional)	⅛ tsp.	1 tsp.
Almond extract (optional)	⅛ tsp.	1 tsp.
Cold water or fruit juice*	¾ cup	5¼ cups
Bottled lemon juice	¼ cup	1¾ cups

Quality - Select ripe but firm yellow peaches. Because the pH is higher in white peaches they are not safe to use in canned pie filling. If using frozen peach slices they must be completely thawed before adding to pie filling. (see third paragraph on page 1.)

Procedure - Peel peaches. To loosen skins, submerge peaches in boiling water for approximately 30-60 seconds, then place in cold water for 20 seconds. Slip off skins and cut slices ½ inch wide. To prevent browning, place slices in water containing 1 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals or 6 crushed 500 mg vitamin C tablets in 1 gallon of water. Blanch peach slices following instructions on page 1. Combine sugar, Clear-Jel, and cinnamon or almond extract (if desired) in a large kettle. Stir. Add water. Stir and cook on medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Drain peach slices. Add lemon juice and boil sauce 1 minute more, stirring constantly. Fold in peach slices and continue to heat for 3 minutes, then fill pint or quart jars, leaving 1 inch headspace. Process immediately (see canning pg. 4).

*Water can be replaced with orange or apple juice or other light colored fruit juice.

Canning

Process fillings in a boiling water canner. Put jars into a canner filled with very hot water. Add water, if needed, to a level of 1 inch above jars. When water boils vigorously, lower heat to maintain a gentle boil and process for recommended time:

Recommended Processing Times for Fruit Pie Fillings in a Boiling Water Canner

Fruit Filling	Jar Size	Process Time at Altitude of		
		0-1,000 feet	1,001-3,000 feet	3,001-6,000 feet
Apple	Pints/Quarts	25 minutes	30 minutes	35 minutes
Blueberry, Cherry, Blackberry, or Peach	Pints/Quarts	30 minutes	35 minutes	40 minutes

After processing, take canner off heat. Remove lid. Wait at least 10 minutes before removing jars of pie filling to reduce the chance of siphoning.

Adapted from National Center for Home Food Preservation, Revised by Nellie Oehler 2019

Using Canned Fillings

Put pie fillings made with Clear-Jel in baked or unbaked pie shells. Cover with a top crust, if desired. Bake at 425° for 20-25 minutes or until crust is brown and filling is hot.

Freezing

Pie fillings made with Clear-Jel can be frozen. It is important to leave adequate head space because the thickened filling will expand when frozen.

To prevent runniness when thawed, cook filling for 2-3 minutes after the fruit is added to the thickened sauce. It is very important that the fillings be thoroughly cooled before freezing.

There are two methods that can be used to freeze pie fillings:

Method I - Freeze in jars or freezer cartons, leaving adequate head space. To use the frozen filling, thaw before putting into the unbaked pie shell.

Method II - Put the cooled filling into an unbaked pie shell and freeze. This will give a product similar to the commercially frozen pies. To bake, place frozen pie in oven and bake at 425°F. for about 20 minutes, then reduce heat to 375°F. and bake until filling is hot and bubbly and crust browned, about 30-40 minutes; OR thaw pie and filling and bake at 425°F. for 20-25 minutes or until crust is brown and filling hot.

Remember that the lemon juice is necessary for both frozen and canned fillings. It helps to stabilize the starch.

Adapted from the Pennsylvania State University Extension Service.

Source: OSU Master Food Preserver Program