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## How to Make Homemade Cherry Pie Filling



Here's how to do it, complete instructions in easy steps and completely illustrated. The cherry pie filling will taste MUCH better than that over-sugared tasteless glop in the can from the grocery store, and by using fresh cherries, the flavor will be much stronger!

Prepared this way, the jars have a shelf life of 18 months to 2 years, and require no special attention.

**Ingredients and Equipment to make 1 quart or 7 quarts of cherry pie filling  
(just double the 1 quart numbers to make 2 quarts, etc.)**

Ingredients for Cherry Pie Filling.		
	Quantities of Ingredients Needed For	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh or thawed sour cherries	3-1/2 cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	1 cup	7 cups
<a href="#">Clear Jel®</a>	1/3 cup + 1 tablespoon	1 and 3/4 cups
Cold water or cherry juice	1-1/3 cups	9 and 1/3 cups
Bottled Lemon Juice	2 tablespoons	1/2 cup
Cinnamon (optional)	1/8 teaspoon	1 teaspoon
Almond extract (optional)	1/4 teaspoon	2 teaspoon
Red food coloring (optional)	6 drops	1/4 teaspoon

- ClearJel® starch - here's where to get it:  
1 Water Bath Canner (a huge pot with a lifting rack to sterilize the jars of cherry pie filling after filling (about \$30 to \$35 at mall kitchen stores, Wal-Mart) You CAN use a large pot instead, but the canners are deeper, and have a rack top make lifting the jars out easier. If you plan on canning every year, they're worth the investment.
- Jar grabber (to pick up the hot jars)
- Lid lifter (has a magnet to pick the lids out of the boiling water where you sterilize them. (\$2 at Wal-Mart)
- Jar funnel (\$2 at Wal-Mart)
- At least 1 large pot
- Large spoons and ladles
- Ball jars (Publix, Wal-Mart carry them - about \$8 per dozen quart jars including the lids and rings)
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## Recipe and Directions

### Step 1 - Selecting the cherries



You can use fresh or even frozen cherries, but obviously you'll get the best price and freshest taste if you go pick your own. Typically, cherries are in season in the US and Europe in April in warmer climates through June in the colder areas - check the harvest calendar for your state! Select fresh, very ripe, and firm cherries. Unsweetened frozen cherries may be used. If sugar has been added, rinse it off while the fruit is still frozen.

## Step 2 - Wash the jars and lids

Now's a good time to get the jars ready, so you won't be rushed later. The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle, the water bath processing will sterilize them as well as the contents! If you don't have a dishwasher with a sterilize cycle, you can wash the containers in hot, soapy water and rinse, then sterilize the jars by boiling them 10 minutes, and keep the jars in hot water until they are used. Leave the jars in the dishwasher on "heated dry" until you are ready to use them. Keeping them hot will prevent the jars from breaking when you fill them with the hot cherry pie filling.



Put the lids into a pan of hot, but not quite boiling water (that's what the manufacturer's recommend) for 5 minutes, and use the magnetic "lid lifter wand" to pull them out.

## Step 3 - Wash the berries and sort!



I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the fruit in a colander of plain cold water.

Then you need to pick out and remove any bits of stems, leaves and soft or mushy berries. It is easiest to do this in a large bowl of water and gently run your hands through the berries as they float. With your fingers slightly apart, you will easily feel any soft or mushy berries get caught in your fingers.

Then just drain off the water through a colander! A number of people have written to ask where to get the conical metal colanders that our grandmothers used - here's where:

#### Step 4 - Pit the cherries

Pit the fresh cherries, and keep them in cold water with 1/4 lemon juice add (to prevent browning)



A cherry pitter is inexpensive and easy to use, once you learn the trick. The goal is to push down so the metal stem holds the pit down against the opening in the bottom of the cup. The pits will not go through the hole; it is just to help trap them. then releasing your grip, the cherry rides up on the metal stem, while the pit remains trapped in the cup, stuck in the hole. Then just push the cherry off and use your thumb on the underside of the cup, to push the pit back out.



#### Step 4 - Blanch the Cherries



It's pretty simple: place the cherries (up to 7 cups at a time) in a large pot with at least 1 gallon of boiling water. Boil each batch 1 minute after the water returns to a boil. You're not really "cooking" the cherries - just blanching them. Blanching means heating the at high temperature for a brief time to stop the enzymes that can cause the flavor to degrade during storage.

Drain and keep the hot cooked fruit in a covered bowl or pot.



### Step 5 - Make the liquid for the filling



Mix 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon of ClearJel starch with each 1 cup of sugar in a large pot. Add the 1 and 1/3 cup of water or cherry juice. If desired, add cinnamon, almond extract, and food coloring. (I don't add food coloring; I prefer mine to be natural!)

Stir mixture and cook over medium high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble.

Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly.

	1 Quart	7 Quarts
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Note: I use cherry juice to add the flavor and natural sweetness, but you can just use cold water, as the cherry juice can be expensive and hard to find.

#### Why use ClearJel?

ClearJel® is a corn starch that has been modified to give it special and unique characteristics when used in food products. It is recommended by the USDA for

<http://www.PickYourOwn.org/cherrypiefilling.htm>

making pie fillings because it does not break down in the acid food mixtures and does not thicken enough during heat processing to interfere with the intended effect of the heat on killing bacteria during canning. In other words it reduces spoilage and is safer than corn starch. It is preferred for thickening canned pie fillings as well as other foods over other corn starches because it has less or no aftertaste, the thickened juices are smooth and clear, and foods thickened with ClearJel® may be frozen.

### **Step 6 - Combine the liquid with the berries**

Fold the berries into the hot liquid. Stir gently.



### **Step 7 - Fill the jars with the cherry mixture**



Pretty self explanatory. A jar funnel helps. Gently jostle the jar to help it settle in the jar and reduce the amount of air space. Fill the jars to within 1/2 inch of the top, wipe any spilled cherry pie filling of the top, seat the lid and tighten the ring around them.

### Step 8 - Process the filled jars in the water bath

Put the filled jars in the canner and keep them cover with at least 1 inch of water and boiling. if you are at sea level (up to 1,000 ft) boil pint and/or quart jars for 30 minutes.

If you are at an altitude of 1,000 feet or more, see this chart.



USDA-Recommended process time for Hot Pack Pint or Quart Jars of Cherry Pie Filling in a boiling-water canner.

#### Process Time at Altitudes of

0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 3,000 ft	3,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
30 min	35	40	45

### Step 9 - Remove and cool the jars - Done



Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight) You can then remove the rings if you like. Once the jars are cool, you can check that they are sealed verifying that the lid has been sucked down. Just press in the center, gently, with your finger. If it pops up and down (often making a popping sound), it is not sealed. If you put the jar in the refrigerator right away, you can still use it. Some people replace the lid and reprocess the jar, then that's a bit iffy. If you heat the contents back up, re-jar them (with a new lid) and the full time in the canner, it's usually ok.



This document was adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 1994, Reviewed June 2006.

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### Other Equipment:

From left to right:

1. Jar lifting tongs to pick up hot jars
2. Lid lifter - to remove lids from the pot of boiling water (sterilizing )
3. Lid - disposable - you may only use them once
4. Ring - holds the lids on the jar until after the jars cool - then you don't need them.
5. Canning jar funnel - to fill the jars and keep the rims clean.

