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How to Make Cherry Butter - Easily! With Step-by-step Directions, Photos, Ingredients, Recipe and Costs

Yield: 5 to 7 pint jars



You think making and canning your own cherry butter is difficult? Well, it used to be! Until crock pots and slow cookers came along!

Now, it's easy! Here's how to do it, complete instructions in easy steps and completely illustrated. The cherry butter will taste MUCH better than anything you've ever had from a store. If you like apple butter, you'll love cherry butter!

You can make with sugar, with no sugar and no sweetener, or with another sweetener (all described below)

Prepared this way, the jars have a shelf life of 18 months to 2 years, and require no special attention. A side benefit is that your house will smell wonderful while it is cooking - much better than potpourri! You can also skip the last canning steps, and just store it in your refrigerator (2 or 3 months) or freezer (indefinitely).

Ingredients

- 4 or 5 quarts of pitted Cherries, fresh or frozen (See step 1 for more details)
You can also use cherry juice (fresh, frozen or bottled)
- 2 tablespoons of ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/2 teaspoon of allspice
- 4 cups your choice of sweetener: sugar, Splenda, honey or frozen concentrated grape juice. (like it or not, sugar yields the best results)

Equipment

- 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 Target, other big box stores, and often grocery stores; and available online - see this page)
- Jar funnel (\$2 at Target, other big box stores, and often grocery stores; and available online - see this page)
- 1 Crock pot (slow cooker) 5 to 6 quart size (if your crockpot is smaller, just reduce the ingredients proportionately)
- Large spoons and ladles
- 1 Canner (a huge pot to sterilize the jars of cherry butter after filling (about \$30 to \$35 at mall kitchen stores, sometimes at big box stores and grocery stores.))
- Ball jars (Grocery stores, like Publix, Kroger, Safeway carry them, as do some big box stores - about \$8 per dozen quart jars including the lids and rings)

Cherry Butter Recipe and Directions

Step 1 - Pick the cherries! (or buy them already picked)

It's fun to go pick your own and you can obviously get better quality ones!

As mentioned in the Ingredients section; you may use frozen cherries (those without syrup or added sugar); which is especially useful if you want to make some jam in December to give away at Christmas! If you are starting with cherry juice, skip to step 6.

How much fruit?

You will need about 6 quarts of finely chopped, pitted cherries (which is about 18 pounds or 12 quart boxes of fresh whole cherries). You can use sweet or sour cherries, but obviously, you'll need to add more sugar with sour cherries to overcome the sourness!

Jam can ONLY be made in rather small batches - about 4 cups at a time - like the directions on the pectin say, DO NOT increase the recipes or the jam won't "set" (jell, thicken). (WHY? Alton Brown on the Food Channel says pectin can overcook easily and lose its thickening properties. It is easier and faster to get an even heat distribution in smaller batches.



Step 2 - Wash the cherries!

I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the fruit in plain cold water. As with other fruit, also pick out any stems and leaves.

With cherries you must remove the pits.



There are inexpensive cherry pitters that work fine for occasional use, or larger more sophisticated pitters if you're going to be doing a lot. BUT we're going to use an easier method - we'll cook the cherries until they are soft, and then use a food mill or strainer to separate the pulp from the pits. If you have a food mill or other strainer, or you are using frozen pitted cherries, skip to step 3.

If you don't have a food mill or strainer, you'll need to do it manually. Here's how:

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.



I'm trying this one out right now. Reviewers say it can handle larger volumes of cherries reliably!

Now, if you absolutely can't get hold of a cherry pitter... I think you could heat the cherries to a boil, then run them through a foley food mill or other strainer, to separate the pits from the cherries. I haven't tried it, but that ought to be easier than manually pitting cherries with a knife.

Step 3 - Fill the crockpot with the cherries



We'll use the crockpot to soften up the cherries so we can pass the pulp through a strainer to remove the pits and any stems.

I fill the crock pot and add 1 cup of apple juice (or cherry juice or water, as you prefer and have available) per pound of cherries. So, for our 6 lb batch, that's 6 cups of liquid. It may seem like a lot of liquid, but the cherries will absorb a fair amount of it.

I turn it on high and let it go for an hour, then turn it down to low for a couple more hours.

Step 4 - Let cool until it is warm, not hot

Why let it cool? It's pretty hard to pick out the pits while you are burning your fingers, that's why! So I let it cool just enough that I can reach in and pick out pits. If you started with pitted cherries, it doesn't matter; you can skip to step 5 and strain while it is hot.



Step 5 - Strain the cooked, softened cherries

A cylindrical food strainer, like the Roma or Vittorio work best. A Foley food mill will work, but it tends to get the pits caught under the blade, so you have to stop frequently to remove pits; but it does a great job and take less time than manually pitting the cherries before cooking.

The Foley food mills (at right) cost about \$30.



Step 6 - Re-fill the crock pot with the strained cherries

After you have strained out the pits and stems, the strained cherries will be pretty smooth - like chunky applesauce. Pour it all into the crock pot and set it on low. You want to evaporate off enough water to yield the consistency that you like. I find that final volume should be about 1/3 the starting volume to get a nice, thick cherry butter.



Step 7 - Add the sweetener and optional spices

If you started with a full crockpot and now it is about half full, you'll add about 4 cups of sweetener. But the key is to taste it. It doesn't need to be sweeter than you like. 4 cups of sugar, Splenda (for diabetics), Honey or other sweetener is just a guideline. Start low and just add enough to suit your tastes.

You can skip the sweeteners entirely, too; but it loses a lot of the richness of flavor, in my opinion.

Now is the time to add spices, if you like them. Taste the cherry butter with just the sweetener in it. It should have a rich dark cherry flavor. Take a spoonful out and sprinkle just a few specks of cinnamon and even less of cloves on it - see how you like that. The spices add a different dimension to it. It tastes great with and without spices. The spices give it the complexity of a fruit butter, but many people like the plainer taste of the fruit alone.

If you do add spice, don't add too much that you overpower the cherry flavor. This is plenty:

- 1 teaspoon of ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

In place of sugar, you can use an equivalent amount of Splenda (sucralose) OR 1 twelve ounce can of frozen concentrated fruit juice (preferably a neutral juice, like grape or apple).

Step 8 - Cook down the Cherry butter

Set the crock pot on low heat.

Cover it loosely or use a large pot splatter-guard. It can spatter as it boils slowly, so I also cover nearby surfaces with towels. You don't want to seal it tightly because you want the steam to escape so it can reduce in volume and thicken. A visitor suggests, take a couple of butter knives, and lay them across the top of the crock pot. They are parallel and located about 2/3 of the way out from the center. Then put the lid on these supports,



leaving it "covering" the pot and keeping the splatters under control, but, leaving a good gap for steam to escape. I just made a batch and tried this approach, but I used a pair of wooden chopsticks or bamboo kebab skewers - they worked great!

Leave it to cook for several hours. How long depends on the size and power of your crockpot, and how thick you like it, If you want to stir it occasionally, that's fine but not necessary. .

Step 9 - Wash the jars and lids, get the water boiling in the canner

Now's a good time to get the the water bath canner boiling and 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 butter.



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 10 - Blend the cherry butter (optional)

You want a smooth, creamy texture, right? The easiest way is to use a hand-held drink blender. It does a great job of making it smooth. You can also put it into a regular blender, but if you are going to do that, you might want to blend the apple sauce before you put it in the crock pot (it will be much thicker afterwards and won't move in a regular blender). Another visitor says running it through a food mill with a fine screen or through a sieve works, too.



Tips:

- Too thick? if the cherry butter cooks down too much or is too thick for your liking, just add a little bit of apple juice and blend it in.
- Not thick enough? Just let it cook some more, with the lid off so the steam can escape!



Step 11 - Fill and seal the jars

If the crockpot isn't keeping the cherry butter boiling hot, you will need to briefly return the butter to the stove to get it hotter. It varies from crockpot to crockpot. I find that if I set my crockpot on high for the 15 minutes before I fill the jars and stir frequently, it gets it boiling. Fill the jars to within ¼-inch of the top, wipe any spilled cherry butter of the top, seat the lid and tighten the ring around them.



Step 12 - Process the jars

Process means put them in the canner and keep them covered with at least 1 inch of water and boiling. if you are at sea level (up to 1,000 ft) boil pint jars for 15 minutes and quart jars for 20 min. If you are at an altitude of 1,000 feet or more, see the chart below. There isn't a USDA or Ball recipe for cherry butter, but their directions for cherry jam and cherry preserves are almost identical; this is just cooked down more and doesn't require pectin, so the processing times borrowed from those recipes should be plenty safe;.



Recommended process time for Cherry Butter in a boiling-water canner.			
Jar Size		Process Time at Altitudes of	
	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Half-pints or Pints	15 min	20	25
Quarts	20	25	25

Step 13 - 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.

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

