

What I've learned from making jam

As many of you know, I am a crazed jam-maker. Nothing pleases me more than waking early on a summer Sunday, and while the house is peaceful, whipping up a few jars of jam. Any flavor, any kind, I love making jam. I love the whole process, from buying the fresh fruit at the market to the chopping, measuring and stirring. Don't forget the pleasure of dipping into a large bowl of fresh, warm sweetness! I have made fig jam on a huge gas stove in Abu Dhabi and crowberry jam in a cast iron frying pan on the arctic tundra. Anywhere, any time, the whole process of making jam brings me great pleasure.



I must confess that I come from a long line of crazed jam-makers. My mother had red currant bushes in her back yard, and nothing was better than her ruby red currant jelly. We eat it on toast, on grilled lamb, and on a spoon right out of the jar. In the summer, my brother and I would pick pails of wild blueberries at the cottage and help my mom make delicious Oden Lake wild blueberry jam. So, my first excuse, if I need one, is that jam-making is in my blood. As a Canadian, I am predisposed to putting summer fruit into jars, perhaps to help us get through those cold winter mornings!

I also believe that making jam, like librarianship, is a creative experience. From finding the perfect recipe (and then, of course, changing it) to stirring a huge pot of boiling sugar, from decorating the jars when cooled to giving them to friends and family, making jam and being a librarian are both creative expressions of one's self and they both require passion!

Jam-making teaches me patience. Like most Baby Boomers, wasting time is a cardinal sin in my book, so learning patience is something I have struggled with all my life. Jam-making requires patience. It takes time to prepare the fruit, cook it and put it into jars. It takes time to become a librarian and to hone your craft and great patience to work with a wide variety of boards, peers and customers. Jam-making and librarianship are lessons in patience.

Most of all, jam-making and being a librarian have taught me that the most precious gift is the gift of time: the time it takes to make a phone call to a friend, to send a card to someone who is grieving, or to give a jar of homemade jam. The same is true in library land. The best thing we can do for our boards, peers and customers is to give them our time: time to really *listen* to their questions, time to demonstrate how to text message a reference question or time to really *show* them how to use a Talking Book.

I could hardly write about what I have learned from making jam without including my favorite Strawberry Orange Jam recipe, which is below. I hope you enjoy making jam as much as I know your family and friends will enjoy eating it!

Kitty's Orange Strawberry Jam

This is perhaps my best jam recipe. It's easy, delicious, and always gets rave reviews. Strawberries lose their color over time, so I always suggest that folks use it up quickly (which is never a problem at my house)!

4 pints fresh ripe strawberries
7 c. white sugar
1 3 oz. package liquid pectin (Certo)**
¼ c. orange liqueur (Grand Mariner is my favorite)
½ tsp. orange extract

6 8 oz. jam jars and lids

** You can find liquid pectin in the grocery store
or at Wal-Mart...next to the jars



Wash, hull, and mash strawberries using a potato masher. You need 4 cups of crushed fruit.

In a large heavy-bottomed pot, combine strawberries and sugar. Don't skimp on the sugar ...you really need the full 7 cups! Using a wooden spoon, stir well and bring to a rolling boil over high heat. It will take 6-8 minutes for the sugar to melt and for the berries to break down. Don't leave the stove; stay with it as it will boil over or burn very quickly. When it is at a full boil, stir in the pectin. Return to a rolling boil, and, stirring constantly, boil hard for 1 minute.

Immediately remove from the heat. Add the orange liqueur (don't add any more than ¼ cup or it will not set!!) and the extract. Stir for 5 minutes. This will ensure that the strawberries don't float to the top of the jam, but rather are distributed throughout the jam. Pour the still-very-hot jam into sterilized jars, wipe the rim clean, and seal. Screw the lids on tightly.

Let cool for 24 hours before washing jars and labeling. This recipe makes 6 ruby red, jars of orange strawberry jam. It's delicious on a toasted English muffin or, even better, served still warm over Dairy Queen!!

Making jam and being a librarian are both good ...no...great things!!

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