



# Using, Storing and Preserving Cherries



*Michigan-grown cherries are available between July and August.*

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## Food Safety and Storage

- Select cherries that are not bruised or damaged.
- Wash hands before and after handling fresh produce.
- Wash cherries thoroughly under cool running water. Do not use soap.
- Store cherries in the refrigerator at or below 41 °F.
- Keep cherries away from raw meats and meat juice to prevent cross-contamination.
- For best quality and nutritive value, preserve only what your family can consume in 12 months.

## Yield

1 pint	=	1¼ pound
1 quart	=	2½ pounds
1 lug	=	25 pounds or 8 to 12 quarts of canned cherries
1 pound (unpitted) cherries	=	1¾ cups pitted

## How to Preserve

### Freezing

Freeze pitted or unpitted cherries. If cherries are pitted, add ½ teaspoon of ascorbic acid to each quart of syrup used to prevent discoloration, or use a commercial ascorbic acid mixture and use according to label directions.

### Tart cherries:

Select bright red, tree-ripened fruit. Stem, sort and wash thoroughly. Drain and pit. Pack using one of the following methods:

- **Syrup pack method:** This is the best method to use for serving cherries uncooked. Pack cherries into containers and cover with cold medium or heavy syrup depending on the tartness of the cherries (see “Syrups for Use in Freezing Fruits” table that follows). Leave ½- to 1½-inch headspace depending on container type. Seal, label, date and freeze.
- **Sugar pack method:** This is preferable for cherries to be used for pies or other cooked products. To 1 quart of cherries, add ¾ cup sugar. Mix until sugar dissolves. Pack into containers, leaving ½- to 1½-inch headspace depending on container. Seal, label, date and freeze.
- **Pectin pack method:** This alternative uses pectin and less sugar than the syrup pack and retains the fresh cherry flavor, color and texture. In a saucepan, combine 1 box of powdered pectin (1¼ ounces) with 1 cup water. Stir and boil 1 minute. Stir in ½ cup sugar and dissolve. Remove the pan from heat; add cold water to make 2 cups of syrup. Chill. Put cleaned and prepared fruit in a 4- to 6-quart bowl; add enough pectin syrup to glaze the fruit with a thin film. Gently fold fruit to coat each piece with syrup. Pack into freezer containers, leaving ½- to 1½-inch headspace depending on container type. Seal, label, date and freeze.

### Sweet cherries:

Pack cherries into containers and cover with cold syrup choosing your preference from the table “Syrups for Use in Freezing Fruits” that follows. For a better quality product add ½ teaspoon (1500 mg) ascorbic acid to each quart syrup. Leave ½- to 1½-inch headspace depending on container type. Seal, label, date and freeze.

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## Syrups for Use in Freezing Fruits

Type of syrup	Percent syrup*	Cups of sugar**	Cups of water	Yield of syrup (cups)
Very light	10	½	4	4½ cups
Light	20	1	4	4¾ cups
Medium	30	1¾	4	5 cups
Heavy	40	2¾	4	5½ cups
Very heavy	50	4	4	6 cups

\*Approximate

\*\*In general, up to one-fourth of the sugar may be replaced by corn syrup or mild-flavored honey. A larger proportion of corn syrup may be used if a very bland, light-colored type is selected.

The “Syrups for Use in Freezing Fruits” table is adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation table of the same name at <https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/syrups.html>. That table was extracted from *So Easy to Preserve*, 6th ed., 2014, Bulletin 989, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Georgia. Revised by E. L. Andress and J.A. Harrison.

## Canning

### Sweet or sour cherries:

Choose mature, bright, uniformly colored cherries, ideal for canning. Stem and wash cherries. Remove pits, if desired. Place pitted cherries in water containing ascorbic acid to prevent stem-end discoloration. With a clean needle, prick skins of unpitted cherries on opposite sides to prevent splitting. You may can cherries in water, apple juice, white grape juice or medium or heavy syrup. Measure and mix the

quantities of sugar and water necessary to make the kind of syrup you desire (see the “Preparing and Using Syrups” table that follows). Bring sugar and water mixture to a boil and stir to dissolve the sugar. Keep mixture hot until ready for use.

All fruits can be safely canned or frozen without sugar. But be aware that some home-canned foods lose color, flavor and texture when canned without the usual sugar and you may then end up with a less plump and flavorful product. Sucralose will allow you to use the same measurement as sugar, which in turn will produce the same amount of syrup to cover the fruit in the jars. Saccharin and aspartame-based sweeteners turn bitter when processed and USDA (2015) does not recommend them for heat-treated products. If you are making jams or jellies without sugar, always use a commercial sugarless gelatin mixture or a special pectin designated for sugar-free or lower sugar jams and jellies (Andress, 2014; USDA, 2015).

Can cherries using one of the following methods:

- **Hot pack method:** Place cherries in a large saucepan, add ½ cup of water, juice or syrup for each quart of drained fruit and bring to a boil. Fill hot jars with cherries and cooking liquid, leaving ½-inch headspace. Fill jar to ½ inch from top with hot liquid. Remove air bubbles; adjust headspace if needed. Wipe jar rims with clean paper towel, adjust lids and process (for recommended processing times, see the table at the end of this document “Recommended Process Time [in Minutes] for Whole Cherries in a Boiling Water Canner”).
- **Raw pack method:** Add ½ cup of hot water, juice or syrup to each hot jar. Fill hot jars with drained cherries, shaking down gently as you fill. Add more hot liquid, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles; adjust headspace if needed. Wipe jar rims with clean paper towel, adjust lids and process (for recommended processing times, see the table at the end of this document “Recommended Process Time [in Minutes] for Whole Cherries in a Boiling Water Canner”).

Recommended process time (in minutes) for cherry jam in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of		
		0 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Hot	Half-pints or pints	5	10	15

“Cherry Jam With Powdered Pectin” recipe is adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation recipe of the same name at [https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_07/cherry\\_jam\\_powder.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_07/cherry_jam_powder.html). That recipe was adapted from “How to Make Jellies, Jams and Preserves at Home.” Home and Garden Bulletin No. 56. Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture. 1982 reprint. National Center for Home Food Preservation, June 2005.

## Cherry Jam with powdered pectin

Yield: 6 half pints

- 4 cups pitted, ground cherries (about 3 pounds)
- 1 box (1¾ ounces) powdered pectin
- 5 cups sugar

Sterilize canning jars and prepare two-piece canning lids according to manufacturer’s directions. Sort and wash fully ripe cherries, removing any stems and pits. Grind cherries.

In a kettle, mix cherries and pectin. Place on high heat. Stirring constantly, bring quickly to a full boil with bubbles over the entire surface. Add sugar, continue stirring and heat again to a full bubbling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; skim foam off top. Fill hot jam immediately into hot, sterile jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened clean paper towel; adjust two-piece lid. Process in a boiling-water canner.

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## Preparing and Using Syrups

Measures of water and sugar						
Syrup type	Approx. % sugar	For 9-pt load (1)		For 7-qt load		Fruits commonly packed in syrup (2)
		Cups water	Cups sugar	Cups water	Cups sugar	
<b>Very light</b>	10	6½	¾	10½	1¼	Approximates natural sugar levels in most fruits and adds the fewest calories.
<b>Light</b>	20	5¾	1½	9	2¼	Very sweet fruit. Try a small amount the first time to see if your family likes it.
<b>Medium</b>	30	5¼	2¼	8¼	3¾	Sweet apples, sweet cherries, berries, grapes.
<b>Heavy</b>	40	5	3¼	7¾	5¼	Tart apples, apricots, sour cherries, gooseberries, nectarines, peaches, pears, plums.
<b>Very heavy</b>	50	4¼	4¼	6½	6¾	Very sour fruit. Try a small amount the first time to see if your family likes it.

- (1) This amount is also adequate for a 4-quart load.
- (2) Many fruits that are typically packed in heavy syrup are excellent and tasteful products when packed in lighter syrups. The USDA recommends that lighter syrups be tried, since they contain fewer calories from added sugar.

This table is adapted from “Table 1. Preparing and Using Syrups” from *Selecting, Preparing and Canning Fruit* on the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at [https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_02/syrups.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/syrups.html). That table was adapted from the USDA’s *Complete Guide to Home Canning* (Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539). Revised 2015.

### Cherry Syrup

**Yield:** 9 half-pints

- 6½ cups of fresh or frozen cherries
- 6¾ cups of sugar

You may also use this procedure with fresh juices from fresh or frozen strawberries, and with fresh or frozen blueberries, grapes or raspberries.

Select fresh or frozen fruit. Wash, cap and stem fresh fruit and crush in a saucepan. Heat to boiling and simmer until soft, 5 to 10 minutes. Strain hot cherries through a colander, and drain until cool enough to handle. Strain the collected juice through a double layer of cheesecloth or a jelly bag. Discard the dry pulp. The yield of the pressed juice should be about 4½ to 5 cups. In a large saucepan, combine the juice with sugar. Bring to a boil, and simmer 1 minute. To make syrup with whole fruit pieces, save 1 or 2 cups of the fresh or frozen fruit, combine these with the sugar, and simmer as in making regular syrup. Remove from heat, skim off foam, and fill clean, hot, half-pint or pint jars, leaving ½-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims, adjust lids and process (see table that follows for recommended processing times for cherry syrup).

Recommended process time (in minutes) for cherry syrup in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of		
		0 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 3,000 ft	3,001 – 6,000 ft
Hot	Half-pints or pints	10	15	20

“Cherry Syrup” recipe is adapted from the recipe “Berry Syrup” from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) *Selecting, Preparing and Canning Fruit*, reviewed February 2018 ([https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_02/berry\\_syrup.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/berry_syrup.html)). The NCHFP adapted it from the *Complete Guide to Home Canning* (Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 539). USDA, 2015.

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Recommended process time (in minutes) for whole cherries in a boiling-water canner.

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitudes of			
		0 – 1,000 ft	1,001 – 3,000 ft	3,001 – 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Raw	Pints or quarts	25	30	35	40
Hot	Pints	15	20	20	25
Hot	Quarts	20	25	30	35

Let jars sit undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours, check lids to be sure they've sealed, remove rings, wash jars, date, label and store. Food in jars that do not seal must be reprocessed in a clean jar with a new lid within 24 hours, refrigerated or frozen.

This table was adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP), *Selecting, Preparing and Canning Fruit: Sweet or Sour Cherries – Whole*, reviewed February 2018 ([https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_02/cherry\\_whole.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/cherry_whole.html)). The NCHFP adapted it from the *Complete Guide to Home Canning* (Agriculture Information Bulletin, No. 539). USDA, 2015.

## References

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