

# Fruit Pie Fillings and other yummy things!

We will demonstrate two ways to turn your fresh fruit into fillings for pies, pastries, tarts, empanadas, puff pastries, yogurt or ice cream topping. You can make a fresh fruit pie today or you can preserve them to use later. So you can have the taste of summer all year round.

**Choose fruit** at its peak of flavor and sweetness. If you want to use less sugar or sweetener choose naturally sweeter varieties of the fruit. For instance, a Granny Smith will take a little more sugar than a Golden Delicious. Ask your grower. Consider combining fruits to assure a firmer filling and flavor.

Hint: Add a high pectin fruit like an apple to peach or berry pies or mix blackberries with blueberries to help filling thicken properly and add a new range of flavor.

**How much fruit?** For a 9 inch pie shell, you will need about a quart of filling or 4-5 apples, depending on size. A quart jar of pie fillings fits perfectly. Larger pie shells require proportionately more filling. You can freeze or can pie fillings in any size you like depending on use. When buying larger quantities for canning/freezing, there are charts available that show average of various fruits/pound. Check your OSU Extension or online.

**Sweeteners:** Cane sugar, raw sugar. Splenda can be used in pies in the same proportions as sugar. Follow recipes for pie fillings using other sweeteners such as agave, stevia or honey. Their proportions and suitability for baking pies or canning may vary.

**Thickeners:** Pectin is a natural substance inside many fruits that causes them to thicken when cooked. Apples, blackberries and quinces are high in pectin and will not need as much thickener. However, some apples, blueberries, cherries, strawberries, rhubarb and peaches do not have as much pectin so they have to be cooked with a thickener to keep the filling from being runny, gluey or too stiff. Here are some common ones.

All-purpose flour: Made from high gluten hard wheat and low gluten soft wheat. Flour is stable and can stand up to prolonged cooking. Gives food a matte, opaque appearance which works well with apple or pear pies but does not look as attractive for berry pies.

Cornstarch: Made from corn, soaked, milled, ground, sieved. Thickens more effectively than flour but needs higher temperatures to thicken. Mix with sugar first to break up any lumps. Can lose thickening power if heated too long. Appearance is clearer than flour but fillings will still be opaque.

Clear-Jel: A modified cornstarch available for home canners online or from OSU Extension. It was developed for food processors. It withstands heat and does not break down or separate under high temperature or when used with high acid fruits. Appearance clear and bright, smooth and a neutral taste. Maximum thickening once cooled.

Note: Clear-Jel is the only thickener approved by USDA for canning pie fillings or other home canned foods where thickener is used.

Quick-cooking Tapioca: Made from the roots of the manioc or cassava plant made into pearls or finely ground into powder. Very good at thickening when hydrated but does not hold up to prolonged cooking. Appearance bright and clear with a smooth but sometimes gluey texture.

Potato Starch and Arrowroot are also available.

**Spices, a little brightness and butter!** Don't forget spices. Apple pie would not be apple pie without cinnamon. Try nutmeg with berries and ground cloves for peaches and apricots. Ginger goes with just about every fruit.

Lemon: Most fruit pies need a little extra acidity to brighten the flavor. A squirt of lemon juice, some zest or even a splash of balsamic vinegar will add another note of flavor.

Butter! Of course. Dot the pie filling with dabs of butter before you put the second top crust on for richness and taste.

**Cooked or uncooked?** Uncooked fillings are most often used for pies, empanadas, cobblers using blueberries, rhubarb, berries of all kinds, apples. On the other hand, cooked fillings provide the cook an advantage. You can control the texture of the filling more consistently before freezing it or canning it or baking it into the finished product with no surprises. Shortens the learning curve. Perfect pie filling every time! Here is a basic recipe but there are many ones in your cookbook. Experiment.

### **Basic fresh fruit pie filling**

4-6 cups of chopped fruit or berries (frozen fruit or canned fruit can be used, use juice to dissolve thickener)

*1-2 Tablespoons cornstarch OR 2-4 Tbsps. flour/tapioca OR 1 ½ -3 Tbsps. Clear-Jel)*

½ cup brown or white sugar or Splenda (adjust to taste)

Lemon zest or ½ tsp lemon juice

Pinch of salt

½ to 2 teaspoons spices

1 tablespoon butter

**Uncooked?** Mix thickener, spices, sugar, pinch of salt together. Toss with fruit and lemon to coat. Pour fruit mixture into 9" pie uncooked pie shell. Dot with bits of butter. Cover with top crust, crimp and seal. May brush with egg wash or milk. Bake at 425 degrees 40-50 minutes or until top crust is golden brown.

**Cooked filling?** Crush 1 cup of fruit with sugar and place in pan. Simmer on low heat until sugar is dissolved. Combine the thickener with equal amount of water in a small bowl, mix thoroughly. Add to pan with fruit. Cook over medium heat until mixture comes to boil and is clear and thick. Pour into large bowl and let cool until warm. Fold in remaining fruit which has been tossed with the spices, salt and lemon. Let cool before pouring into 9 "piecrust. Dot with butter and add top crust. Seal the crust with vent holes. Bake 375 degrees 40 minutes. Cover edges with foil if getting too brown.

### **Fresh Strawberry Pie:**

1 cup sugar

3 Tablespoons cornstarch or Clear-Jel

1 quart fresh berries of any kind

½ cup water

2 teaspoons lemon juice

1 (9-inch baked pie shell or cookie crust)

Crush ½ of the strawberries with the lemon juice and water in a saucepan. Mix sugar, thickener together to smooth powder. Add to the crushed strawberries. Cook until thickened. Chill. Fill cooled pie shell with remaining berries, halved and cover with cooked mixture. Top with whipped cream. Chill.

## Preserving for Long-term storage:

You can make pie fillings from your own frozen fruit or from store bought frozen fruits or canned fruit, such as peaches, berries, cherries. All you have to do is thaw them and drain away excess juice or syrup. You may have to compensate for the sugar used in freezing or canning when you are making your pie filling. If your pie filling recipe calls for water to dissolve a thickener, be sure to use some of the juice or syrup from the fruit for added flavor.

Frozen: Any cooked filling can be frozen in freezer containers or even freezer bags in convenient sizes for 6 months for best flavor. Smaller containers may be used for yogurt or ice cream toppings or to drizzle over pound cake. A quart sized container fills an 8" or 9" pie shell or a dozen small tart or puff pastry shells. Thaw the filling in the refrigerator. Do not use a microwave to thaw. It may break down the thickener used. Clear-Jel or cornstarch work best but other thickeners will work as well. Use in 6 months.

## Freezer Peach (Apricot) Pie Filling

Makes 3 quarts of filling

- 12 cups fresh peaches, peeled and sliced
- 2 cups sugar
- 5-6 Tablespoons tapioca or Clear Jel

Mix sliced peaches and any reserved juice with 1 ½ cups sugar in a large pot. Bring to a boil. Add the other ½ cup sugar mixed with the tapioca. Boil again for 1 minute, stirring gently. You do not want it to be mush. Remove from heat and cool. Divide and place in freezer containers. Each quart of filling will make 1 pie. Thaw as needed and use to make a pie as you would with a regular fruit pie.

Canned: Any cooked filling using Clear-Jel can be safely preserved in glass quart or pint jars in a boiling water bath. It will be waiting on your shelf for that winter pie, or cobbler for a potluck or whatever. Be sure to consult your Ball Canning book or your OSU Extension for information on how to safely can using this method and how long your pie filling needs to be processed to assure the best flavor. A pressure canner is not needed.

## Canned blackberry pie filling

Makes 7 quart jars.

- 6 quarts fresh blackberries.
- 7 cups sugar
- 1 ¾ cup Clear Jel
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 9 1/3 cup water or juice
- ½ cup lemon juice

Combine Clear-Jel, sugar, cinnamon in large pan. Add water/juice and mix until smooth. Heat until mixture bubbles, stirring constantly. Add berries and fold in. Remove from heat. Fill 7 quart jars leaving 1" headspace. Process in boiling water bath for 35 minutes. Remove jars with canning tongs and cool. Test seals, label and store in cool, dry place for up to 1 year.

## **Resources:**

OSU Extension Service <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fch/food-preservation>  
1320 Gaines NE, Salem, OR (503) 373-3763

Clear-jel packaged in small quantities available at cost for home canners. Lots of free information on freezing and canning.

<http://www.thekitchn.com/> Basic fruit pie filling

<http://www.food.com/> Fresh Strawberry Pie recipe Ball Canning Book.