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Heidi Darby
Buffalo County Extension
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It's Jam and Jelly Making Time!

Summer is at its peak. The fair is over, and kids are buying school supplies. Guess what else it is? It's jam and jelly making time. Many families are buying pencils, backpacks, glue sticks and more. As for me, I'm stocking up on pectin, sugar, and mason jar flats. In our home it's all hands-on deck for jelly and syrup making. Is anything better than fresh syrup on your pancakes or waffles? What about fresh jelly on warm homemade bread? It's hard to find something better for a weekend breakfast or a quick snack.

I remember making jelly with my mom when I was little. Actually, my memory is more of eating the warm jelly on toast while she was making more. I'm pretty sure I ate way more than she knew about. She would make apricot; it was sweet and tangy at the same time. One thing that I distinctly remember is that she would use wax to seal the jars. It was always a competition with my sister to be the one to "break" the wax on a new jar. The small little things that bring out sibling rivalry!

When I got married, my mother-in-law wanted to teach me how to make her favorites. They were wild plum and chokecherry. We would drive around on gravel roads focusing on the trees in the ditches, looking for the perfect wild plum or chokecherry bush. It was always hot when we were picking them. Of course, she directed me to the best branches, and I was the fruit fetcher. We spent a lot of time together, picking the berries, sanitizing the jars, making jelly, and putting it in jars. She was so patient with me, we really enjoyed that time together in the kitchen. We would make as much as we could before we were tired or ran out of berries or jars. However, it was never enough to get us through until the next summer.

Making Homemade jelly with my family is a great time to make memories too. I have continued to make it over the years with my kids and now as empty nesters, my husband and I are again making

more jelly. My mother-in-law was a bit of a purist when making jelly. She wouldn't mix fruits and stuck to the recipes. Our daughter on the other hand was not a purist. The combinations she came up with were always good, just a bit odd. One year for her Food Preservation project, she submitted three different jams. One was mulberry-raspberry-rhubarb. Wow, was it tasty! The judge asked her how she came up with it. Her response was, they were her favorites, so she put them all together. I mean, why not? Other varieties that year were peach-pineapple and wild plum-raspberry. Again, they were different mixtures but were all really good.

Jams and jellies are great but sometimes you just want a thick syrup to put on pancakes and waffles. Currently, we are experimenting with the correct recipe to make chokecherry syrup. We want it to be pourable but not too thin. The notes above my stove are jumbled with the original jelly recipe scratched out and altered to reflect adding extra juice or less pectin until we find the perfect concoction. Below is the best recipe we have found so far. It is the perfect thickness. Not so jelled, it won't pour but not too thin that it glides off your pancake. Yes, it has been tested on hot pancakes, a few times. Quality control is important, so we had to test it more than a few times.

Darby's Chokecherry Syrup

7 Cups prepared juice

9 Cups white sugar

1 package of sure-jell pectin

1 tbl. butter

Add cooled juice to kettle and stir in pectin. Bring to a rolling boil. Add sugar and butter. Bring back to rolling boil. Boil for two minutes. Skim and pour into hot jars. Process in water bath canner.

As you can see, making homemade jellies, jams and syrups are the perfect way to wrap up your summer. If you find yourself with extra fruits this summer, experiment with jams and jellies. It's ok to let your flavor imagination run wild. We would love to see your concoctions at the County Fair. If you have

questions on our Food Preservation classes, reach out to your local Extension Office. We have classes on jelled exhibits, dried fruits and vegetables, canned pickles and sauces and more.

Heidi Darby

4-H Extension Assistant

Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County

1400 East 34th St. Kearney, NE 68847 308-236-1235