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How to Can your Own Mixed Fruit Cocktail

Making and canning your own delicious mixed Fruit Cocktail is easy and safe with this USDA-tested recipe! This recipe uses peaches, pears, green grapes, cherries, but the Ball Blue Book points out that you could also freely substitute nectarines, pineapple, apricots, grapefruit, plums, etc. Some of the photos are just of peaches, but that's just because my camera malfunctioned when I made this recipe. Yield: 6 pint jars

Ingredients

- 3 lbs peaches or nectarines
- 3 lbs pears
- 1-1/2 lbs seedless green grapes (preferably slightly under-ripe)
- 10-oz jar of maraschino cherries
- 3 cups sugar (or 3 cups honey - but sugar is easier to use) See step 2 for other options.
- 4 cups water

Equipment

- large pot of boiling water
- large bowl of ice water
- a sharp knife
- saucepan
- Spoons, ladles
- Water bath canner
- Jar tongs

Directions - Step by Step

Step 1 - Selecting the peaches, pears, cherries and grapes

The most important step! You need fruit that is sweet, but still firm, not overripe or even dead ripe - and to make the work easier, cling-free (also called freestone). This means that the peach separates easily from the pit! Same with nectarines and this doesn't apply to cherries or plums. Don't miss the [peach picking tips page!](#)



Choose ripe, mature fruit of ideal quality for eating fresh or cooking. They should not be mushy, but they also should not be rock hard: just as ripe as you would eat them fresh.

Step 2 - Prepare the sugar (or other sweetener) solution

Fruit must be packed in a solution of water and sugar or fruit juice. It's up to you which to use. Sugar is added to improve flavor, help stabilize color, and retain the shape of the fruit. It is not added as a preservative. Sugar solution is much less expensive (unless you have a supply of cheap grape juice), so I usually use a light solution to keep sugar (and the added calories) to a minimum.



Yes, honey could be used in place of sugar, but I will warn that it is very sticky and can be messy to work with.

Sugar Syrup

Syrup	Sugar	Water	Yield
Light	2 cups	6 cups	7 cups
Medium	3 cups	6 cups	6 1/2 cups
Heavy	4 cups	6 cups	7 cups

NOTE: you can ALSO use fruit juice (if you want a natural alternative) or water or artificial sweetener (Splenda, but NOT Nutrasweet; if you want a low calorie alternative). [Click here for instruction about how to prepare these sugarless, fruit juice, or Splenda solutions!](#)

To prepare syrup, while heating water, add sugar slowly, stirring constantly to dissolve. Bring to a gentle boil and keep it simmering. After preparing the liquid syrup, keep it hot (but not boiling).

Step 3 - Wash the jars and lids

This is a good time to get the jars ready! The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sterilize" cycle. Otherwise put the jars in boiling water for 10 minutes. I just put the lids in a small pot of almost boiling water for 5 minutes, and use the magnetic "lid lifter wand" (available from target, other big box stores, and often grocery stores; and available online - see this page) to pull them out.



Step 4 - Wash the fruit!

I'm sure you can figure out how to wash the fruit in plain cold or lukewarm water



Step 5 - Peeling the Peaches, Nectarines, Plums, Apricots



Nope, we're not going to peel them by hand; that's way too much work. Instead, here's a great trick that works with many fruits and vegetables with skins (like tomatoes): just dip the fruit in boiling water for 20 to 45 seconds.



Remove from the boiling water using a slotted spoon and put into a large bowl or pot of cold water and ice for several minutes

The skins will easily slide off
Nectarines do not need to be
mind the skins. Neither do
people prefer them with
to be slimy after all this.

SAVE THE PEELINGS in the
[peach honey!](#)



now!
peeled, if you don't
peaches, but most
skins off - they tend
fridge - to [make](#)

And yes, you could leave the skins on, but they fall off in the jars anyway and look rather unpleasant.

Step 6 - Cut up the fruit

Cut out any brown spots and mushy areas. Cut the peaches, pears, plums, apricots, etc. in half, or quarters or slices, as you prefer! Remove pits, stems and any other inedible bits.



Step 7 - Prevent the fruit from darkening!



Peaches, nectarines, plums, grapes and many other fruit will turn brown when exposed to air, even air in a sealed, sterile jar. To keep the fruit from turning brown, when you get a bowlful, sprinkle 1/4 cup lemon juice or Fruit-Fresh (which is just a mix of citric acid and vitamin C,



perfectly natural). Then stir the peaches to make sure all the surfaces have been coated.

Step 8 - Fill the jars

Drain the mixed fruit (I just put it in a colander). Next add 1/2 cup of the hot syrup from step 2 to each jar. Then gently fill the jar with mixed fruit and more hot syrup, until you reach 1/2-inch from the rim (which is called leaving 1/2 inch of headspace)



Step 9 - Process the jars in the water bath

Put the sealed jars in the canner and keep them cover with at least 1 inch of water and boiling. In general, if you are at sea level, boil them for at least 20 minutes (and no more than 30 min).

Here are more specific guidelines from the USDA for canning peaches in a boiling-water canner (neither the USDA nor Ball have times for a pressure canner, meaning they feel a water bath canner yields the best results)

Recommended process time for Mixed Fruit Cocktail in a boiling-water canner.

	Raw-Pack Process Time at Altitudes of			
Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 3,000 ft	3,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Half-pints or Pints	20 min	25	30	35

Step 10 - Remove and cool

Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight), here they won't be bumped. 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 (with a new lid) and reprocess the jar, while it's still hot for the full time in the canner - that's acceptable!



How long will the jars be good? The USDA usually recommends eating them within 1 year, but as long as you follow the recipe, the jars stay sealed, and you store them in a cool, dark place (like a basement), they keep indefinitely, although there is a slow loss of quality over time.

Other Equipment:

From left to right:

1. Jar lifting tongs
helpful to pick up hot jars
2. Lid lifter
- to remove lids from the pot of hot water
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



Frequently asked questions!

1. Is it safe to can unpeeled peaches, nectarines, apricots, plums, etc?
I've spent hours on websites and read several books on canning - to no avail. This is the second year I've canned unpeeled peaches and other stone fruit in a 5 to 1 water to sugar syrup (we're still alive). All my friends, their mothers and everything I've read says to peel and I'm beginning to buckle under all the finger wagging!!!

Answer: Buckle not! It is perfectly safe to can peaches and other stone fruit with the skins on! Most people don't because some folks think it feels like they're swallowing a cat (short hair, not Persian) when they eat a peach with the fuzzy skin still on! :) But it is perfectly safe! (canning unskinned peaches, not cats, that is! :) ..I'm gonna get letters on this one, for sure...

2. I just canned mixed fruit for the first time. The seal seams good but I have air bubbles in my jars. Is this OK?"

Answer: Yes, that's common. Some of the air came from bubbles trapped between the pieces of fruit you put in the jar. Other bubbles came from air trapped within the fruit itself. As long as the jar was processed according to the directions and it sealed properly, it is perfectly safe to eat!

3. I just finished canning a 1/2 bushel of mixed fruit, including peaches. Followed your instructions to the T. But had a very difficult time peeling the peaches. Put them in boiling water for a minute, shocked them in ice water, but the skin would not come off. Set them again in boiling water for 2 minutes, same shock treatment, only about 10 out of the approx.110 peaches were as easy to peel as you described. What am I doing wrong. I want to can the second 1/2 bushel with less peeling effort.

Answer: Ah, that usually means they weren't ripe. I'll bet they were rock hard, or close to it. Not much to do about that other than let the ripen (soften) first OR peel them hard with a vegetable peeler. If you let the remaining peaches sit at room temperature for 2 or 3 days, they'll soften and it will work!

This document was adapted from the "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 2006.

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