

## Judging Jams, Jellies and Preserves

Headspace for jams, jellies, other sweet preserves and butters should be  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch.

Canned jams, jellies and preserves should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness. The variety of fruits that are made into sweet spreads and preserves include many textures, shapes and colors, but it is still possible to describe desirable characteristics for each class of food.

Jelly is a semi-solid mixture of fruit juice and sugar that is clear and firm enough to hold its shape. Other spreads are made from and include chopped, crushed or ground fruit. Jam also will hold its shape, but it is less firm than jelly. Jam is made from crushed or chopped fruits and sugar. Jams made from a mixture of fruits are usually called conserves, especially when they include citrus fruits, nuts, raisins, or coconut. Marmalades are soft fruit jellies with small pieces of fruit or citrus peel evenly suspended in a transparent jelly. Traditional home canned preserves are made of small, whole fruits or uniform-size pieces of fruits in a clear, very thick to slightly jellied sugar syrup. Fruit butters are made from fruit pulp cooked with sugar until thickened to a spreadable consistency.

### Judging Criteria for Jellies

Jars of jelly should be held up to a good light source to check for clarity and color. Any sample taken out of the jar to check tenderness and consistency should not be put back into the jar. The consistency of jelly can be judged without removing from the jar. Turn the jar on its side and give it a single, sharp shake. Then rotate the jar slowly at an angle or on its side. The jelly should pull away from the jar cleanly, without breaking and without leaving any residue on the jar. The shape of the jar should be retained and the entire mass of jelly should be able to be rolled around inside the jar in one mass. If a single, sharp shake does not loosen the jelly, try tapping the bottom edge of the jar against the heel of the hand.

Clarity or Clearness	Clear, usually sparkling, transparent or translucent (depending on fruit juice). Free from sediment, cloudiness, pulp or crystals. Pepper jellies will be a little cloudier or have slight amount of pulp that should be suspended throughout the jar.
Color	Natural coloring. Close to characteristic color of original juice.

### **Judging Criteria for Jellies**

Pack	Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from air bubbles and foam.
Consistency	Firm enough to hold shape, but tender (quivers). Entire half-pint or pint jar contents should stay together and not break apart. Leaves clean, sharp edge when cut. Not sticky, gummy or syrupy.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.
Flavor/Odor	If jelly is tasted: Characteristic of the base fruit. Not too sweet or too tart. No scorched (burned) or musty odors.

### **Judging Criteria for Jams and Conserves**

Jams are made from chopped, crushed or ground fruit. Shape of the fruit pieces is not retained during preparation. Jam is a shapeless mass outside of the jar, with a uniform, soft consistency thick enough to spread. Juices are of a slight jelly-like consistency. Conserves are a combination of fruits, usually citrus fruits and nuts, and sometimes raisins or coconut, with a consistency like jam.

Clarity or Clearness	Even though there is no separated jelled juice, the jam and conserve should be translucent and not “muddy” looking. Free from separation into layers, sediment, cloudiness or crystals.
Color	Natural coloring. Characteristic of the cooked fruit. Free of discoloration, especially from burning or scorching in preparation.
Pack	Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from air bubbles and foam.
Consistency	Smooth, thick, uniform throughout. Easily spreadable; not too stiff. Not runny, gummy or syrupy.

## **Judging Criteria for Jams and Conserves**

Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.
Flavor/Odor	If jam or conserve is tasted: Characteristic of the natural fruit. Not too sweet or too tart. Not overcooked or burned. The flavor of a conserve should be that of the dominant fruit. No scorched (burned) or musty odors.

## **Judging Criteria for Preserves and Marmalades**

Traditional fruit preserves consist of small, whole fruits or uniformly sized pieces of larger fruits in a very thick sugar syrup or slightly jellied juice. Very thin slices or lemon or lemon juice may have been added. Marmalades consist of pieces of fruit cut in small pieces or slices, and usually include citrus. A mixture of fruits may be used. The pieces of fruit or citrus peel are suspended in a clear, translucent jelly.

Clarity or Clearness	Syrup or jellied juice is clear, and bright in color. Syrup in preserves appears thick to “heavy” like honey and surrounds all fruit. Free from mushy broken-apart fruit tissue, sediment, cloudiness, or crystals.
Color	Natural coloring. Characteristic of the base fruit. Pieces of fruit are translucent to clear.
Pack	Headspace ¼ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Good proportion of syrup and solids. Fruit well covered with syrup in preserves. Free from air bubbles and foam.
Texture/Consistency	Fruit pieces are tender and hold their shape. Pieces of fruit are uniform in size.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.
Flavor/Odor	If preserves or marmalade are tasted: Natural flavor. Not too sweet or strong flavor from overcooking. No scorched (burned) or musty odors.

## **Judging Criteria for Fruit Butters**

Fruit butters are made from fruit pulp cooked with sugar until thickened to a spreadable consistency. They are smooth with even, fine-grained textures of medium-soft consistency. They are not jelled and are usually less sweet than jams, conserves, marmalades or preserves. When the closed jar is turned on its side, a fruit butter should move very slowly and in a solid mass.

Color	Natural coloring. No darkening or discoloration from burning (scorching) during cooking. Spices such as cinnamon, allspice and cloves may darken the butters.
Pack	Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from trapped air or bubbles.
Consistency	Smooth, even grain. Thick enough to mound on spoon. Not runny. No separation of fruit and juice. No pieces of skin, seeds or other foreign matter.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.