



*Photo courtesy of tallcloverfarm*

Sometimes I wish I was a poet. Then I could truly express the exquisite taste of my favorite fruit, apricots. I

It is hard for me to make anything other than plain, unadulterated apricot jam. It is so perfect in and of itself. However, I know you come here for more than the basics so I will to go beyond (er, around) perfect and give you something a little more creative. How about Brandied Apricot Preserves?

What is a preserve, anyway?

A preserve is a soft spread in which the fruit is preserved with sugar so it retains its shape and is transparent, shiny, tender and plump. The syrup varies from the thickness of honey to that of soft jelly. A true preserve does not hold its shape when spooned from the jar.

### **Brandied Apricot Preserves**

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving

5 cups sliced pitted fresh apricots

2 cups chopped cored peeled tart apples

2 cups granulated sugar

½ cup liquid honey

2 Tbsp lemon juice

1 cup brandy

In a large stainless steel saucepan , combine apricots, apples, sugar, honey, and lemon juice. Stir to mix well. Cover and let stand at room temperature for 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare canner, lids and jars.

Bring reserved apricot mixture to a boil over medium heat, stirring to dissolve sugar. Reduce heat and boil gently, stirring frequently, until mixture thickens, about 25 minutes. Remove from heat and test gel (read more below). If gel stage has been reached, skim off foam. Stir in brandy and return to medium heat. Boil gently, stirring constantly, for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and skim off foam.

Ladle hot preserves into hot jars leaving  $\frac{1}{4}$  ' headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace, if necessary, by adding more hot preserves. Wipe rim. Center lid on jar. Screw band down until resistance is met, then increase to finger-tip tight.

Place jars in canner, ensuring they are completely covered with at least 1" of water. Bring to a boil and process for 10 minutes. Adjust for elevation, if needed. Remove canner lid. Wait 5 minutes, then remove jars, cool, and store in a cool dark place.

**Tip:** Allowing fruit-sugar mixture to stand releases the fruit's natural juices. It also firms the remaining fruit solids and helps them retain their shape in the thick gel, creating a preserve.

### **Understanding "Gel Point"**

There are three tests you can perform to ensure your soft spread made without the use of commercial pectin has reached the gel stage.

**Temperature Test** Cook the soft spread until it reaches a temperature of 220°F, or 8°F above the boiling point of water. Measure the temperature of soft spreads with a candy or jelly thermometer. Always insert the thermometer vertically into the soft spread and ensure that it does not contact the surface of the pot.

**Sheet Test** Dip a cold metal spoon into the boiling soft spread. Lift the spoon and hold it horizontally with edge down so that the syrup runs off the edge. As the mixture cooks, the drops will become heavier and will drop off the spoon separately but two at a time. When the two drops join together and "sheet" off the spoon, the gel stage haven reached.

**Refrigerator Test** Chill two or three small saucers in the freezer. Place a teaspoonful of soft spread on the chilled saucer and place in the freezer for 1 minute. Remove the saucer from the freezer and push the edge of the spread with your finger. A mixture that has reached the gel stage will be set, and the surface will wrinkle when the edge is

pushed. Note: To prevent overcooking or scorching, remove the soft spread from the heat before performing this test.

If the test you performed shows that the gel stage has not been reached, return the mixture to the heat to cook for a few minutes longer, then retest the soft spread.

### **ADJUSTING FOR ALTITUDE**

Not everybody lives at the same altitude. At sea level, water boils at 212° F. All recipes are developed using sea level as the criteria for processing times. At higher altitudes water will boil at a lower temperature. Adjustments have to be made to insure safe canning. If you are at a higher altitude you must adjust the processing times according to the following chart.

<b>Altitude Chart</b>	
<b>Altitude in feet</b>	<b>Increase processing time</b>
1000 - 3000	5 minutes
3001 - 6000	10 minutes
6001 - 8000	15 minutes
8001 - 10000	20 minutes