Jams and jellies are one of the most common home-canned foods in the United States. They taste delicious, and best of all, they can successfully be prepared with little know-how about canning. Here are some frequently asked questions about making jams and jellies.

Why should I process jams and jellies in a water bath?
Making jelly products in a boiling water bath is the best way to extend shelf life because it prevents spoilage. Jelly products are high-acid foods so they can be safely processed by this method.

While bacteria cannot grow in the high-sugar, acid environment, mold and yeast can. Yeast ferments jelly products. Signs of fermentation are gas bubbles and an alcoholic odor.

Mold often grows on the surface of jelly that was improperly sealed or on jars and lids that were not sterilized properly. You can identify mold by the fuzzy appearance and musty odor.

Should I throw out moldy jelly products?
Yes. Some molds form poisons called mycotoxins. Repeated exposure to mycotoxins is suggested to be associated with cancer. Simply removing the mold from the surface is not enough. Mold has a “root” system that cannot be seen. Mold may also cause allergic reactions and respiratory problems.

Can I seal my jelly with paraffin wax?
No. Over time, paraffin begins to pull back from the sides of the jar, creating openings where mold and yeast can enter and contaminate the product. Jelly products that are sealed with paraffin wax are safe to eat but are likely to spoil quickly.

Can I made a double batch of my jelly recipe?
It is safer to make a single recipe at a time. When you make more jelly, you have to heat it longer. The pectin, which makes the product gel, often breaks down because of the longer heating time. You will end up with a syrupy product instead of a gelled one.

Is it safe to eat cloudy jelly?
Yes. Jelly may be cloudy for one of the following reasons.
- The jelly set too fast. If the juice was high in pectin, the jelly might have started to set as soon as it was removed from the heat.
- When poured into jars, air bubbles may have become trapped, giving a cloudy appearance.
- Jelly was allowed to cool before it was poured into jars.
- Juice was not strained to remove all pulp. If the jelly bag is squeezed to yield more juice, there is a greater chance of cloudy jelly.

Where should I store my jelly?
Store canned products in clean, dry, dark areas. Exposure to light can affect their color, making them look less appetizing. The temperature of the storage area should be between 50 and 70 degrees. Generally, the higher the storage temperature, the shorter the shelf life of the product.

Source: N.C. State University

Blueberry Jam
9 cups crushed blueberries
6 cups sugar

Combine berries and sugar in a large sauce pot. Slowly bring to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly to jelling point. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. While hot, pour into hot jars, leaving 1/4 inch head space. Adjust caps. Process 15 minutes in boiling water bath. Yield: about 3 pints