



MAKING AND USING SIMPLE SYRUPS

Simple syrup is made with water and a sweetener and is used in the traditional way to can fruits. They are packed in a sweet syrup mixture and then processed in a water bath canner. In modern times, many home preservers are looking for alternatives to reduce the amount of processed sugar that their family is consuming, and the option to vary the sugar content of their food is appealing.

I would suggest leaning towards the side of using the least amount of sweetener possible. You can always add more sugar, but it's impossible to take it away if you've used too much.

USES FOR SIMPLE SYRUP

There are many safe variations to the heavy syrup previously used in canning recipes and you may even be surprised to learn that this old-fashioned practice can be used effectively in recipes for healthy drinks, as an addition to yogurt, over pancakes, and for preserving food.

We'll give you plenty of ideas and recipes below.

Canning - First, know that fruit may be canned without sweetening at all. It can be packed in juice made from the fruit itself, in purchased apple or orange juice, or in water. Sugar does help canned fruit to hold its shape, color, and flavor, but it is not needed to prevent spoilage, so you can skip it all together.

Frozen fruit – You will often find that frozen fruit purchased at the grocery store has been dipped in light simple syrup before it is frozen. You can accomplish this same taste by making your own simple syrup with less sugar content.

Dehydrated fruit – Some fruit will oxidize and get a brownish color as it is being dehydrated. These include apple, peach, nectarine, banana, and pear. Dipping them in a syrup solution will keep the enzymes from turning the fruit an off color. This can also be accomplished with ascorbic acid powder or lemon juice, so don't think that you must dip these fruits. Many people skip this all together because they are not concerned about the color change and do not want to add additional calories to their dehydrated fruit.

Drinks – Making your own drink syrups is a fun and economical way to use excess fruit during the harvest season. You can make syrup for lemonade, ginger ale, and many kinds of herbs. Use your imagination and leftover fruit scraps to create something terrific.

Fruit syrup - Have you priced a jar of blueberry, blackberry, or raspberry syrup lately? Then you know that making it yourself is really the way to go! If you always seem to have a few blueberries that remain in their container past their prime, make syrup instead of throwing it away.

MAKING SIMPLE SYRUP WITH SUGAR

These syrups can use used in caning fruit or as a fruit dip before freezing or dehydrating.

Instructions: Add water and sugar to a large pot. Bring contents to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring until the sugar is completely dissolved. Reduce heat to low and keep warm when used for hot processing fruit for canning. Make ahead and chill for use as a fruit dip for freezing or dehydrating. You will need between 1 and 1-1/2 cups of simple syrup for each quart jar of fruit.

Heavy Simple Syrup = 4 cups sugar to 4 cups water (yield 7 cups syrup)

Medium Simple Syrup = 3-1/4 cups sugar to 5 cups water (yield 7 cups syrup)

Light Simple Syrup = 2-1/4 cups sugar to 5-1/4 cups water (yield 6.5 cups syrup)

Extra Light Simple Syrup = 1-1/4 cups sugar to 5-1/2 cups water (yield 6 cups syrup)

Ultra Light Simple Syrup = 1/2 cup sugar to 5 cups water (yield 5 1/4 cups syrup)

MAKING SYRUP WITH HONEY

Honey is an excellent substitute for processed sugar and one that is readily available. It can safely be used as a replacement in canning, freezing and dehydrating.

For honey syrup - Mix 2 cups of honey with 4 cups of very hot water. Choose a light-flavored honey for making your syrup so that they honey taste will not overpower the fruit flavor.

Variation – 1 cup of sugar, 1 cup of honey, plus 4 cups of water = 5 cups of light syrup. Using instructions for light simple syrup (above), cook on stovetop until sugar is dissolved.

MAKING SYRUP WITH ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

Do not use artificial sweeteners as a substitute for honey or sugar, these products will develop an off-taste under the high temperatures of canning. Some products like NutraSweet® and Equal® will lose their sweetness altogether.

FRUIT SYRUPS

Fruit syrups can be used in several ways. As mixers with other beverages, as an addition to coffee or herbal tea, or added to yogurt or a milkshake for a special treat. Of course, don't overlook drizzling it on pancakes, pastries, ice cream, or pie. Processing time is often just 15 to 20 minutes so you don't have to set aside a whole day to make a tasty treat.

BLUEBERRY BASIL SYRUP

Note: you can replace any fruit, omit or replace the herbs in this recipe, or substitute store bought juice instead of processing fresh fruit into juice. It's that versatile!

Using a non-reactive pan, cook 1 pint of blueberries in 2 ½ cups of water. Bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring and mashing the fruit as it cooks. Strain through a colander to remove the berries. Set them aside.

2 cups of blueberry juice (above)

2 cups of sugar

1 cup fresh basil leaves

1/8 tsp. ascorbic acid

1. Combine the juice, sugar, and basil leaves in a saucepan, and bring to a full boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Skim off any foam.
2. Remove from the heat and strain out the basil leaves.
3. (optional) return to the sauce pan and add back the berries, simmer for 2 minutes.
4. Remove from heat and add ascorbic acid, stir.

Pour into sterilized containers, seal and label. This syrup can be used immediately or stored in swing-top bottles for up to a year with ascorbic acid added, or 6 months without it. Reducing the sugar content will reduce the shelf life. Store bottles in the refrigerator for up to two weeks after opening.

Honey Lemonade SYRUP CUBES

Make these in the winter when citrus is inexpensive and you'll have it available during the hot days of summer. Change it up with lime, grapefruit, or orange juice. Yield 1-1/2 cups syrup

1/3 cup honey

Juice of 8 lemons (about 1-1/4 cups)

In a small saucepan over medium heat, warm the honey. Add lemon juice and cook, stirring for another 30 seconds. Remove from heat and let cool.

Freeze in ice cube trays. A cube is about 2 tablespoons.

To use: combine 4 tablespoons of syrup (or 2 cubes) with 1 cup of water. Add more sweetening if desired.

GINGER SYRUP

4 cups of water

2 cups of sugar

1 large ginger root (about 8 ounces)

10 whole cloves

non-reactive pan

1. Wash and prepare the ginger root by slicing it into even sections, not too thick. Use a mandolin slicer for even cuts, but a knife works just as well. If you are going to make candied ginger, take the time to peel the root first.
2. Combine the ginger slices, water, sugar, and cloves in a pan. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar.
3. Reduce the heat and simmer for 30 to 60 minutes. Keep it partially covered so some steam is escaping.
4. Strain the mixture and pour the syrup into 8-ounce jars. The ginger and spice can be used for another batch by adding another 4 cups of water and 2 cups of sugar to the pan, and repeating the process.

Make ginger ale with 1 tbsp. of syrup mixed with seltzer, club soda, or sparkling water. Add to herbal tea as a spiced sweetener on a cold day.