

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the Old Fashioned On Purpose podcast. It's summertime and everything is in season. If you go to the farmer's market or the grocery store, and you score a fantastic deal on some amazing fresh fruit, perhaps you decide to make some jam. So you start googling some jam recipes. Or maybe you look in your canning book only to discover that every single recipe you find calls for tons of white sugar. Now this very issue actually kept me from making jam for years. But in today's episode I'm going to show you some handy tips that will allow you to reduce the sugar you have to use or use natural sweeteners like honey. I'm your host Jill Winger and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel a little bit uninspired by modern life. I'll show you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by growing your own food and mastering old fashioned skills.

Speaker 1: [01:19](#) So if you have ever felt a little bit taken back by some traditional jam recipes, you are not alone. And like I stated a few minutes ago, I actually didn't even try making jam for the longest time because I could not reconcile that some of these recipes actually contained more sugar than fruit or at the very least sometimes the amounts were equal. That does seem ridiculous to me, especially because when I'm making fruit jam, it's not ice cream. I don't want it to be necessarily dessert. I just want it to be a little bit of sweetness added onto my toast or peanut butter and jelly. So adding that much white sugar to those beautiful strawberries or peaches just felt unforgivable. Now, most of the time I just want to remind you, because we've talked about this before, when it comes to canning, you can't do a lot of tweaking to the ratios and guidelines that you're using.

Speaker 1: [02:28](#) Pretty much all canning recipes are there for a reason. They are there to make sure that food is going to be safe after it goes on the shelf. However, the good news is that when it comes to jams and jellies, we have a little bit more wiggle room and you absolutely can create jams that don't use as much sweetener or use alternative sweeteners or more options there that are a little bit healthier for you. So the key to making these low sugar jams or jellies comes down to understanding something called Pectin. So we're going to do a little bit of science in this episode today, and then we're going to dive in to how to actually make this happen. Please bear with me, this isn't complicated, but once you understand it, it's all going to make sense. Pectin is a 100% naturally occurring starch that's found in the cell walls of most fruits and vegetables.

Speaker 1: [03:41](#) So it's there, it's not some crazy chemical, it's there naturally. When you cook, pectin into higher temperatures around 220

degrees Fahrenheit and you combine it with its' partners in crime, which are sugar and acid, it creates that firm texture that we really expect in our jams and jellies. Otherwise we just have fruit syrup, which is fine but a little bit harder to put on toast. Right. So different fruits or vegetables, we'll have different amounts of pectin in them. A few examples of fruits with higher amounts of Pectin are sour apples, you know, like granny Smith, the green ones, citrus, cranberries and plums, and that's just a few of them. Fruits with lower levels of pectin would be the sweeter apples, like galas and the fujis, Sour Cherries, or choke cherries just to name a few. And then we have a class of fruits with no pectin at all.

Speaker 1: [04:52](#) That would include Blueberries, apricots, sweet cherries, peaches, pears and strawberries. So if you're canning any of that latter group into preserves or jams, you definitely want to add pectin because they have none on their own. Okay. So like I mentioned, Pectin doesn't work alone. It has some friends. And in order for Pectin to do its thing, we need to have acid and sugar in the recipes as well. So acid does its thing by extracting the pectin from the fruit helps with that process. And that's why sometimes you'll see high acid fruits mixed with slightly lower acid fruits or on. Another option is to just add some lemon juice into recipes. Now something like lemon juice or additional acid also plays another role in keeping the fruit a little brighter colored, a little more vibrant because sometimes after we cook it or it's exposed to air, it gets a little dull.

Speaker 1: [06:01](#) To be honest, the color of my jams and jellies or canned fruit isn't a huge deal to me, but it's kind of fun to have those pretty bright jars on the shelf. Sugar has a role in, of course, making things taste better, but it also helps to draw water away from the Pectin, which in turn gives it a chance to firm up. So with your standard Pectin or the Pectin that is found in naturally occurring fruit, you need to have the sugar and acid so it all works together. However, there is one exception to that. There are a few special kinds of pectin that use other mechanisms to gel and that enables us to either omit the sugar or change it up because we don't need the sugar to make the Pectin firm up. So if your head is spinning, let's just condense this down into three bullet points or compartments.

Speaker 1: [07:07](#) I like to organize this idea of jam-making into three types. Type number one, you can use regular traditional pectin recipes and those are the ones that call for a whole heck of a lot of sugar to make your traditional Pectin do its thing. And when I say traditional Pectin, I'm talking about probably the run of the mill pectin you have sitting on the shelves of your local grocery store

right now. They come a little canisters. There's a couple of different brands. It's pretty easy to find and if they just say pectin on them, then you're going to need quite a bit of sugar to make it work. Type number two is you can actually skip the Pectin or let me say, shall I say, the added pectin altogether and try a no pectin added jam. Number one, you're going to have to do this with fruits that have some pectin in them to start. And also we'll have to add sugar and boil the fruit for a pretty long time because that's going to activate the pectin.

Speaker 1: [08:23](#)

Unfortunately, these no-pectin-added recipes while I have tried them, I have done them. They're not my favorite because I have to babysit them. They're cooking for 30 to 40 minutes. Usually I have to stir them. I often scorched them and have burnt jam on the bottom of the pot. I also kinda feel like if I'm taking these fragile berries and boiling them for 40 minutes, I'm kinda cooking them into oblivion. No-pectin-added jams can also, even if you do everything right, not gel up as firmly. That is an option. If you don't have any way to get pectin and you want to make jam tomorrow, you can try that. Otherwise, I would recommend my number three type of jam, which is to use a special pectin that's designed to gel without a lot of sugar. So let's just cap or recap that just for a minute.

Speaker 1: [09:25](#)

We have type number one: use regular old pectin and lots of sugar. Type number two you can do a no-pectin-added jam that requires a lot of boiling and still sugar. Or type number three, my favorite. Use a Pectin that's designed to gel without a lot of sugar. Alright, sound good? Are you with me? Okay. So now that you understand the inner workings of what's going to make your jams and jellies gel up, let's dive into the specifics of what you're going to actually need. I highly recommend jam if you're new to canning, if you're feeling a little bit nervous, you're not sure where to start. You want to make sure you're doing it right. Jam is a great place to begin because it's very safe and it doesn't require a ton of special equipment. Technically, since you are water-bathing jam, we don't have to use a pressure canner.

Speaker 1: [10:20](#)

So you don't even have to get a special pot. You can simply just use a stock pot with a lid that you already have in your kitchen. And usually jam ingredients are pretty easy to source. The toughest one to find will likely be the Pectin. And even then, it is really not that hard to find pectin especially because it's very simple to order it online. Okay, so here's what you're going to need to get started with your low sugar jam. So first off, you're going to need some fruit. You can pretty much make jam out of any fruit you like: you can do berries or stone fruit like peaches or apricots, apples, cherries. The list goes on. You can also mix

fruits. So there's tons of options. A little side note here, you probably know this, but I just want to clarify in case there's any confusion, the difference between jam and Jelly would be that jelly is made with fruit juice. It's clear and it's especially firm. On the flip side, Jam is actually made with more of a fruit puree, though it's chunkier and a little bit softer. I personally prefer to make jam just because it eliminates me from having to go through the step of juicing the fruit. I don't have a juicer and I don't really love the idea of cooking it down and smashing the juice through a strainer or a bag, and I also like that I don't have to discard any pulp with the jam. I could just use the whole fruit and mashed it up, and call it good. But there's really no right or wrong way or right or wrong one. You get to pick which one you like the most. Along with the fruit, we're going to need that pectin.

Speaker 1: [12:19](#) You can make your own pectin. I've seen different tutorials online, so that's a possibility. However, considering that it's natural and it's pretty easy to find and also inexpensive, I like to simplify things and just purchase my pectin. You can often get pectin at your local grocery stores if your store has a canning section, or maybe a big box store or even a hardware store. Generally what you're going to find in smaller stores is the regular pectins. Like I mentioned before, they are the ones that are more common and they require more sugar. For this recipe or these techniques, we're using a low sugar pectin, so make sure you're paying attention to labels that will say low sugar or no sugar added Pectin right on the label or you can grab it online. My very favorite brand of low sugar pectin is called Pomona's and I will drop a link to that in the show notes.

Speaker 1: [13:28](#) It's a 100% pure citrus Pectin, so it's all natural and it's kind of cool because it actually uses calcium to create the gel action. In your little box of Pomona's, you're going to get a packet of Pectin and also you're going to get a little packet of calcium powder that you just mixed with water and that all comes together. You don't have to buy it separate. There's also other brands of low sugar pectin like Ball, which is the same company who makes jars. Just be sure whatever type of Pectin you get, you're going to read the directions carefully because they all differ just a tiny bit, especially if you are using Pomona's. Like I said, Pomona's has that calcium powder, that you mix up with water ahead of time.

Speaker 1: [14:31](#) It's very simple, and not complicated, but because of that additional calcium water, you got to make sure you're following the directions accordingly. So if you are trying to convert a jam recipe into a low sugar jam recipe, remember that the

instructions in your pectin packet trump the instructions in your actual recipe. Okay, and lastly, for this process, you're going to need some sweetener. Now of course, white sugar is what people have done and added to their jams for years. I personally prefer to use honey in my home canned jams. You can also often use no sweetener at all if you are using that type of low sugar pectin. My Pomona's packet actually has directions for just using fruit juice in jams and jellies as a sweetener. Now keep in mind, even if you're very, very much anti-sugar, some fruits really need a little bit of sweetener to be edible.

Speaker 1: [15:40](#)

If you have some strawberries that aren't super sweet, you just try to can those with no sugar at all, it's probably not going to be super pleasant to eat that jam on toast. The good news is depending on your family's preferences, you can really tailor the amounts to fit your palette. In addition to honey, you could also use Stevia if you're just trying to get a little bit of sweetness. There is also a type of Stevia called Truvia, which is more bulky. And by bulky, I mean, you know, Stevia, if you're not familiar with it, is straight from a plant. There are Stevia plants that you can grow in your garden. I've done it before, I'm really good at killing Stevia, but I have grown them successfully a few years. But the leaves are intensely sweet. And the Stevia we get at the store is usually little tiny packets or a little tiny bottles because it is so potent.

Speaker 1: [16:43](#)

So when you add Stevia to a recipe, even if the recipe calls for a cup of sugar, we're usually only using, you know, a quarter teaspoon or a half a teaspoon of Stevia because it's so strong. That works for some things, but for other things, you know, when we're baking and a recipe calls for a cup of sugar in a cookie recipe, adding a quarter teaspoon of Stevia is going to mess up the recipe because we require that bulk, right? We need that bulk of granulated sugar. So Truvia, you can get it at most grocery stores, is Stevia in more of a base, so it's a little bulkier and you can actually measure it one to one as you would sugar. I personally haven't used it, but it's worth a try if you're really trying to cut sugars out of your diet. Now keep in mind if you are experimenting with alternatives, sweeteners, the color of your jams will often be a little bit darker, which personally doesn't bother me, but if you want bright red strawberry jam, it's probably not going to be super vibrant and the jam might be a little more runny.

Speaker 1: [17:58](#)

White sugar does the best job in terms of color and firmness, but for me, having a slightly runnier jam is worth the trade off of using honey or whatever instead. A little side note about using honey. I like to specify that when I am putting honey on toast or

biscuits or using it in recipes that are not cooked, I prefer a very high quality raw local honey and I will spend more money to find that and get it into my pantry. That being said, when I am canning, and I know I'm putting honey into a batch of jam, that's going to go into my water bath canner for 25 minutes. I don't want to use my super nice raw local honey. What I do instead is I go to Costco or wherever you get bulk food and they get a slightly lower grade of honey, which is still organic.

Speaker 1: [18:59](#)

You know, it's still a good brand, but it's not raw. It's not like the cream of the crop for honey, it's more mid-grade and that makes it more affordable for me to use that in my canned recipes. Now maybe you have bees and you have honey coming out your ears and you can use your raw honey no matter how much you want because you have so much, that's fabulous but otherwise get the cheaper stuff for canning. Also, I get a lot of questions about using artificial sweeteners. Splenda is one that comes up a lot. I am not a fan of artificial sweeteners in any capacity, jam or otherwise. I don't think their health ramifications are worth any benefit they may provide. They have some scary health effects associated with them. I would recommend avoiding artificial sweeteners like Splenda or aspartame, anything like that.

Speaker 1: [19:59](#)

Avoid it like the plague. Don't use it in your canning or anywhere else. If you gather those ingredients and some jars and a pot, you're going to be well on your way to making low sugar jams and jellies for your home pantry. I wanted to go into the next step of the recipe, but I realize it's kind of tough to demonstrate a cooking technique on a podcast. So here's what I did. Instead I created a series of videos where you can actually come into my kitchen with me and watch me make a batch of jam with Pomona's Pectin and also a batch where I add no pectin at all and use granny Smith apples instead. These videos are completely free for you to watch. All you have to do is go to theprairiehomestead.com/jam and you can get access to those videos.

Speaker 1: [21:06](#)

I wrote up a special mini ebook with the recipes and all the information we talked about in today's episode plus some extra stuff and you can grab that for free. We have a little robot set up. It'll walk you through the prompts. It's super easy to check out and get started and that my friends is all for our jam episode. Thanks for listening and I would be so honored if you would subscribe to this podcast and take a moment to leave a quick review over on iTunes so more people can find us and bring homesteading into their lives. That's all for now, but I

can't wait to chat with you on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.