What are jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters?
Jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters are defined as a mixture of fruit, sugar, and pectin that forms a thick or semi-solid gel. The products are categorized by their fruit content and consistency.

- A jam or preserve is made from crushed or ground fruits and can contain pulp and/or seeds.
- A jelly is made from the juice of the fruit. Jellies are often transparent and contain no pulp or seeds.
- A fruit butter is made from crushed fruit and sugar, and it usually contains additional spices and/or flavoring.

Some examples of these include:
- Strawberry, blueberry, and blackberry jam – made from crushed fruit.
- Grape and apple jelly – made from grape or apple juice.
- Apple and pumpkin butter – made from crushed apples or pumpkins and spices.

Why prepare jams and jellies?
Jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters are value-added products with a long shelf life. Making and selling these types of products allows you to use excess produce and reduce waste.

How do I know if the jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters I want to sell require state inspection?
Depending on the fruit (or other ingredients) you are using, you might be able to sell your product without having a state inspection. If applicable, this exemption allows you to prepare your product from a private home kitchen that is not inspected and to sell directly to the consumer from your private home or at a farmers market. Figure 1 provides a detailed decision tree to help you determine if your product requires any additional testing, or an inspection. However, if you want to sell your product at wholesale (to other businesses), your kitchen must be inspected.

Note:
Warning: Products made with low-acid ingredients (e.g., pumpkin butter, squash butter, and bacon jam) are popular products that could be produced unsafely. Products with low-acid ingredients could be at risk for botulism. It is essential to test low-acid products to determine their safety.
ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF LOCALLY PREPARED FOODS

If the type of jam, preserve, jelly or fruit butter that you are making requires testing (see figure 1), the pH and water activity tests can be done through a process authority, food scientist, or food-testing laboratory. If after testing, it is determined that your product is an acidified food (through pH and water activity testing), you must go through a process authority for safe processing guidelines. For a list of process authorities, please consult the following Association of Food and Drug Officials list of food processing authorities (http://www.afdo.org/foodprocessing)

What steps do I follow to sell my product under the inspection exemption?

Selling under the VDACS inspection exemption means you are selling your product out of an uninspected kitchen. The requirements that must be followed are:

1. Have a label that includes all general labeling requirements (see below) as well as the name, physical address, and telephone number of the person preparing the food. Additionally, the phrase “NOT FOR RESALE – PROCESSED AND PREPARED WITHOUT STATE INSPECTION” must be displayed prominently on the front label.

2. These products can only be sold at farmers markets, or a private home, to an individual for their own consumption.

3. These products cannot be sold across state lines, on the internet, or in stores (at wholesale).

It is also important to note that even if you sell your product without inspection, you must produce a safe product and know what makes your product safe. For example, you must know if your product is acidic and therefore prevents microbial growth.

What are some guidelines for producing Jams, Preserves, Jellies and Fruit Butters safely?

- Ensure that fruits are high quality. Utility-grade fruits can be used as long as fruits are not rotten or moldy.
- Use proper cleaning and sanitation practices.
- Observe proper personal hygiene, including hand washing.
- Wear food-safe gloves during food handling and food preparation.
- Purchase ingredients and products from approved, reputable suppliers.
- Become familiar with safe canning procedures (fig. 2).

What steps do I follow to sell my product under inspection?

1. Familiarize yourself with the regulatory process of starting a food business.
   - Refer to the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services’ webpage Home & Commercial Kitchen-Based Businesses for more information.

2. Complete and submit the correct application that pertains to where you will be producing your product (Application for Home Food Processing Operation or Application for a Commercial Kitchen Food Processing Operation).

3. After you submit your application, VDACS will review your application for completeness and will contact you with further questions and/or to schedule an inspection.

Figure 2. Strawberries that have been boiled to make strawberry jam. (Photo by Renee Boyer.)
For more information about how to produce high-quality jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters at home, please refer to:

- USDA’s “Complete Guide to Home Canning”
- University of Georgia’s National Center for Home Food Preservation website.
- University of Georgia’s “So Easy to Preserve”
- VCE publication 348-585, “Pressure Canning” (Boyer and Chase 2016).

See Additional Resources for information to access these publications.

How should my jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters be stored at the farmers market?

Homemade jams, preserves, jellies and fruit butters should be sold and stored in canning jars with sealed lids, as shown in figure 3. As with all canned foods, store and sell your products in a cool and dry location. Heat (including storing in a sunny location or trunk of a car) can greatly affect the quality of canned products.

What are the requirements for my label?

Regardless of whether you sell your product with or without inspection, the product should be clearly labeled and should include:

- Statement of identity (product identity).
- Net weight in U.S. standard weight units and metric units.
- Ingredients (by descending weight).
- List of allergens.
- Name and address of manufacturer.
- Consumer storage and preparation instructions.
- Best-by date. (Typically, jams, preserves, jellies, and fruit butters will have a shelf life of at least 12 months. The best-by date on the label indicates how long the product will be of best quality.)

Additional Resources


Code of Virginia. 2019. Title 3.2 subtitle IV chapter 51 article 4. 3.2-5130. Available at: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title3.2/chapter51/section3.2-5130/.

University of Georgia. “National Center for Home Food Preservation.” nchfp.uga.edu/.