



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot
For week of April 27, 2009

Strawberry Season is Here!

Whether you raise or purchase your strawberries, nothing heralds the beginning of the annual fruit harvest like the first bite of that luscious red strawberry. Whether you're adding color to your spinach salad (also from your early garden), enjoying strawberry pie or just eating them plain, the arrival of the spring berries sets us in motion to enjoy a season of nature's bounties.

When buying strawberries, select bright, fresh clean fruit with a full, solid red color, bright green caps attached, and no moisture, dirt, or decay spots. Avoid strawberries that are dried or shrunken, without green caps, covered with white spots, or in stained containers, which indicated soft, bruised fruit.

Strawberries are usually purchased by the pint or quart or by the pound. They may also be picked by the pound or flat or crate.

How many berries will you need?

If you buy or pick.... You will have....

1 quart	1½ pounds fresh berries
1 gallon	6 pounds fresh berries
1 flat	12 pints fresh berries

Your yield will be...

1 pint	10 ounces whole berries without caps
1 quart	3 cups preserves

Strawberries are highly perishable. Berries will lose quality rapidly when left at warm temperatures. When you purchase them, refrigerate them unwashed and uncapped. Wash them a few at a time as you are ready to use them.

Freezing Strawberries: Strawberries can be frozen whole, sliced, mashed, or pureed. Strawberries packed in dry moisture-proof containers keep a shorter length of time than those packed in sugar and syrup. However, if you cannot use sugar, dry-packing will work. Simply wash and cap the berries. Drain well. Seal in the moisture-proof containers.

For a syrup pack: Pack strawberries in a 40% sugar syrup (3 cups sugar to 4 cups water). Add ½ teaspoon ascorbic acid to each quart of syrup to prevent darkening.

For a sugar pack: Gently mix ¾ cup sugar with 1 quart berries. Pack berries in containers, leaving a headspace.

For a Tray Pack: Place berries in a single layer on a baking sheet or tray. Place them in the freezer. When berries are frozen, pack them in containers.

Strawberries can be made into jam or preserves. The conventional recipes call for using sugar. When making any jellied product, DO NOT attempt to double or alter a recipe. There are many options for making any jelled product. You can use a commercial pectin, or make it without the added pectin. There are now options for making jellied products with artificial sweeteners.

Below is a recipe for a basic Strawberry jam. If you are interested in recipes for jams and jellied products made with artificial sweeteners, come by the Limestone County Extension office. For questions on any food preservation topic, you may contact Betty Ann Broman at the Limestone County Extension office (256-232-5510) or Emily Campbell in the Jackson County Extension office (256-574-2143)

Strawberry Jam *(makes about 4 half-pints)*

Crush two pounds strawberries in a large, thick-bottom saucepan and add sugar. Heat slowly to a boil, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Then, increase heat and boil rapidly until mixture is thick, stirring frequently to prevent sticking. Fill hot jars immediately with jam, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Process in a boiling water-bath canner: Half-pints for 5 minutes; Pints & quarts for 10 minutes.

(Source: Food Preservation in Alabama, Auburn University)

If you have questions on home gardening or related topics, remember that the Limestone County Master Gardeners have a 'HelpLine' on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. They are highly trained and willing to help with your home gardening and home grounds questions. Their phone number is 232-5510 and they are located in an office at the Limestone County Extension Office at 1109 W. Market Street in Athens.

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