

Jellies and Jams 101: Not all spreads are created equal

The Food and Drug Administration has Standards of Identity which have been in place since 1940 for what constitutes a jam or a jelly. Interestingly enough, the current standards are based on the housewife's formula that even pioneer women used when making their own jams and jellies -- approximately half fruit and half sugar. Following are definitions of the terms.

A **jelly** is a clear, bright mixture made from fruit juice, sugar and often pectin or acid. No less than 45 pounds of fruit must be used for each 55 lb. of sugar. Must contain at least 65% Brix in the finished product.

High-fructose corn sweeteners are used interchangeably with sucrose due to the benefits each brings to different product formulations. Originally, cane sugar was used exclusively. Its use can be traced back to the 16th century when the Spanish came to the West Indies where they preserved fruit.

A **jam** is a thick mixture of fruit and sugar (and often pectin) that is cooked until the pieces of fruit are very soft and almost formless -- the texture of a thick purée. It is also made with 45 lb. of fruit solids combined with 55 lb. of sugar. Must contain at least 65% Brix in the finished product.

A **preserve** is almost identical to a jam but preserves can contain large chunks of fruit or whole fruit. It is made with 47 lb. of fruit solids combined with 55 lb. of sugar. Must contain at least 65% Brix.

A **conserve** is much like a preserve but usually contains more than one kind of fruit and often nuts. No standard of identity exists.

A **marmalade**, on the other hand, is also like a preserve but contains some amount of fruit rind, usually from a citrus fruit. No standard of identity exists.

Fruit spreads such as those that have surfaced over the last 15 years, do not fall under the jelly or jam Standards of Identity, hence the generic name "fruit spreads." These products are usually made with fruit juice concentrates or low-calorie sweeteners replacing all or part of the sugar. No standard of identity exists, and generally they are less than 65% Brix.

A **fruit butter** is a spread that is made by cooking fresh fruit with spices until it becomes thick and smooth. Fruit butter has a FDA Standard of Identity, and must be five parts by weight of fruit to two parts by weight of sweetener (72% fruit, 28% sweetener). Must contain at least 43% Brix.

Over the years, other non-nutritive sweeteners in addition to saccharin have been approved for use in fruit spreads, including aspartame in 1989, sucralose in 1998, neotame in 2002 and acesulfame potassium in 2003.