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Raspberry Habañero Jam
Makes 2 (half-pint/250 ml) jars

I've always been of the opinion that when it comes to preserving raspberries, the simplest approach is the best. And so, I typically make my jam with just enough sugar to ensure a set and a squirt of lemon juice for balance. But once while wandering a farmers' market, I happened on a vendor selling homemade jams. She had a spicy raspberry jelly that made my eyes water. Once the burn faded, I realized that there was something about the way the raspberry and the peppery heat went together that made me want to try it in my own kitchen. Combined with a little cider vinegar, it makes an excellent glaze for chicken wings.

1 dry quart raspberries (about 1-1/2 pounds/680 g)
1-1/2 cups/200 g granulated sugar
1 Habañero pepper, sliced along the sides
Juice of 1/2 lemon

Prepare a boiling water bath and 2 half-pint/250 ml jars according to the process [see below]. Place 2 lids in a small saucepan of water and bring to a gentle simmer.

In a medium bowl, combine the raspberries and sugar. Using a wooden spoon, stir the sugar into the fruit, mashing up the fruit a bit as you go. Once the raspberries begin to release some juice and the sugar is starting to dissolve, scrape the berry mixture into a large skillet. Add the hot pepper.

Bring the jam to a boil over high heat, stirring regularly, until the berries break down and the syrup thickens. You should smell both the sweetness of the sugar and the heat of the pepper. It's done when you pull a spatula through the jam and it doesn't immediately rush in to fill the space you've cleared.

Remove the jam from the heat and fish out the spent Habañero. Funnel into the prepared jars, leaving 1/2 inch/12 mm headspace. Wipe the rims, apply the lids and rings, and process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes [see below].

How to Process

1. If you're starting with brand-new jars, remove their lids and rings. If you're using older jars, check the rims to make sure there are no chips or cracks.
2. Put the rack into the canning pot and put the jars on top.

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3. Fill the pot (and jars) with water to cover and bring to a boil. I have found that this is the very easiest way to heat up the jars in preparation for canning because you're going to have to heat up the canning pot anyway. Why not use that energy to heat up the jars as well?

4. Put the lids in a small saucepan, cover with water, and bring them to the barest simmer on the back of the stove.

5. While the canning pot comes to a boil, prepare your product.

6. When your recipe is complete, remove the jars from the canning pot (pouring the water back into the pot as you remove the jars) and set them on a clean towel on the counter. There's no need to invert them; the jars will be so hot that any remaining water will rapidly evaporate. Remove the lids from the saucepan with tongs or a magnetic lid wand and lay them out on the clean towel.

7. Carefully fill the jars with your product. Depending on the recipe, you'll need to leave between 1/4 and 1/2 inch/ 6 and 12 mm of headspace (that's the room between the surface of the product and the top of the jar). Jams and jellies typically get 1/4 inch/6 mm, while thicker products and pickles get 1/2 inch/12 mm.

8. Wipe the rims of the jar with a clean, damp paper towel or kitchen towel. If the product you're working with is very sticky, you can dip the edge of the cloth in distilled white vinegar for a bit of a cleaning boost.

9. Apply the lids and screw the bands on the jars to hold the lids down during processing. Tighten the bands with the tips of your fingers to ensure that they aren't overly tight. This is known as "fingertip tight."

10. Carefully lower the filled jars into the canning pot. You may need to remove some water as you put the jars in the pot, to keep it from overflowing. A heat-resistant measuring cup is the best tool for this job. If you're canning in an asparagus or 4th burner pot, you will be stacking your jars. Take care as you do this.

11. Once the pot has returned to a rolling boil, start your timer. The length of the processing time will vary from recipe to recipe.

12. When your timer goes off, promptly remove the jars from the water bath. Gently place them back on the towel-lined countertop and let them cool.

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13. The jar lids should begin to ping soon after they've been removed from the pot. The pinging is the sound of the seals forming; the center of the lids will become concave as the vacuum seal takes hold.

14. After the jars have cooled for 24 hours, remove the bands and check the seals. You do this by grasping the jar by the edges of the lid and gently lifting it an inch /2.5 cm or two off the countertop. The lid should hold fast.

15. Once you've determined that your seals are good, you can store your jars in a cool, dark place (with the rings off, please) for up to a year. Any jars with the bad seals can still be used – just store them in the refrigerator and use within 2 weeks.