

Quick Scuppernong Grape Jelly

Time: About 30 minutes active time, plus one hour to let the grape juice drip through a fine strainer

We are nearly delirious with desire for scuppernongs, the green-bronzy wine grapes of the Southeast, with their tough, leathery slip-skins and refreshing, vigorously sweet juice that holds traces of honeysuckle and musk. Maybe it's the big hit of resveratrol (a bracing phyto-compound alleged to have health benefits) we get when we eat a bunch of them—more likely, though, it's their complex, soaring sweetness throwing all our switches. Scuppernongs begin to ripen in the Deep South as early as late August and extend their season to mid-autumn in the higher elevations of North Carolina and Virginia. An old Southern tradition uses their skins to make grapeskin pie.

We just like to make jelly.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a heavy, non-reactive 2-quart saucepan, a conical sieve and cheesecloth, a jelly bag, or a tamis, a whisk, a large mixing bowl, and a clean, dry 12-ounce jar.

Ingredients

3 pounds ripe Scuppernong grapes, washed

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon powdered pectin

Directions

1. Pull the grapes from their stalks, discarding any that are obviously bruised or damaged, and transfer them to a heavy, non-reactive 2-quart saucepan. Squeeze the grapes through your fingers, slipping their skins off. Mash the pulp slightly with a fork or potato masher. Set the pan on the stove over medium-low heat and cook, stirring occasionally, until the grape juices flow and begin to simmer, about 10 minutes. Simmer 5 minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat.
2. Set a conical sieve lined with damp cheesecloth, a jelly bag or a tamis over a large mixing bowl and pour the grapes and juices through. Allow the juice to drip into the bowl without pressing on them (which can make the juice cloudy), about an hour.
3. When the pulp and skins lining the cheesecloth, jelly bag or tamis look dry and no more juice drips, discard the pulp and skins and pour the juice (there should be 1 1/2 cups) into a 2-cup glass measure. Cover and refrigerate the juice until it is cold.
4. Mix the sugar and pectin together in a small bowl and set it aside. Turn the chilled grape juice back into the (clean) saucepan and bring it to a simmer over medium-high heat. Pour the sugar mixture into the grape juice and whisk vigorously. Return the juice to a simmer and simmer briskly for 2 or 3 minutes, whisking constantly. Remove the saucepan from the heat and taste for sweetness, adding more sugar if it suits you. Pour the jelly into a clean, dry 12-ounce wide-mouth jar. Cool until tepid, cover and refrigerate. Keeps refrigerated for several weeks.

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Makes 1 1/2 cups