- Prep Time: 20 Minutes
- Cook Time: 40 Minutes
- Canning/Processing Time: 10 Minutes (Optional)
- Total Time: 1 Hour 10 Minutes
- Yield: 6 half-pint (8 oz) jars
- Difficulty: Intermediate

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Ingredients

The Fruit Base

- 1 lb (450g) Fresh Cranberries: Rinsed and picked over (discard any soft or wrinkled berries).
- 1 lb (450g) Tart Apples: (Granny Smith or Honeycrisp work best). Peeled, cored, and finely chopped.
- 2 Medium Oranges: You will need the zest of one and the juice of both. Save the membranes to make a pectin bag.
- 1 cup (200g) Granulated Sugar: Adjust based on your preference for tartness.
- 1 cup (200g) Light Brown Sugar: Packed. This adds a molasses depth that complements the spices.
- 1 cup (240ml) Water: To help the fruit break down.

The Spice Profile

- 1 Cinnamon Stick: (Approx. 3 inches)
- 4 Whole Cloves: (Or 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves)
- 1 Star Anise: (Optional but highly recommended for that festive “holiday” flavor)
- 1/2 teaspoon Ground Nutmeg: Freshly grated is best.
- 1/4 teaspoon Salt: To balance the sweetness.

The Setting Agent

- 1 packet (1.75 oz / 49g) Powdered Pectin: Ensure it is regular pectin, not low-sugar.
- 1/2 teaspoon Butter: (Optional) To reduce foaming.

Equipment Needed

- Large, heavy-bottomed pot (non-reactive, like stainless steel or enamel).

- Wooden spoon.
- Ladle.
- 6 sterilized half-pint jars with lids and bands.
- Canning pot (if processing for shelf stability).
- Potato masher.

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare the Fruit and Flavor Base (Intensity: Low)

Begin by preparing your ingredients. Zest the orange directly into your large pot. Peel the oranges, removing the white pith. Segment the oranges over a bowl to catch the juice, then roughly chop the segments. Add the chopped orange segments, caught juice, and the chopped apples to the pot.

Rinse the cranberries and add them to the pot along with the water. Note: To create a natural pectin bag, take the seeds and membranes from the oranges, tie them in a piece of cheesecloth, and toss that into the pot. This helps the jam set naturally.

Place the cinnamon stick, cloves, and star anise into a small spice bag or wrap them in cheesecloth so you can remove them easily later.

Step 2: The Initial Simmer (Time: 15 Minutes, Intensity: Medium-Low)

Place the pot over medium-low heat. Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking. Simmer for about 15 minutes, or until the cranberries begin to “pop” and the apples have softened significantly.

Use your potato masher to gently crush the fruit mixture. If you prefer a smoother jam, you can pulse it a few times with an immersion blender (be careful not to splatter). If you like a chunky texture, simply mash lightly.

Step 3: Adding Sugar and Spices (Time: 5 Minutes, Intensity: Low)

Add both the granulated sugar and the brown sugar to the pot. Stir continuously until the sugar is completely dissolved. This should take about 3 to 5 minutes. Add the ground nutmeg, salt, and the spice bag you prepared earlier.

Step 4: The Rolling Boil (Time: 1 Minute, Intensity: High)

Turn the heat up to high and bring the mixture to a full rolling boil—a boil that cannot be stirred down. Ensure you are stirring constantly to prevent scorching as the sugar concentration rises. Let it boil hard for exactly 1 minute.

Step 5: Adding Pectin (Time: 5 Minutes, Intensity: High)

In a small bowl, combine the powdered pectin with 1/4 cup of additional granulated sugar (from your pantry, not the recipe measurements). Mix well. Slowly stir the pectin mixture into the boiling fruit. Add the 1/2 teaspoon of butter now if you are using it (it helps prevent foam).

Return the mixture to a full rolling boil and boil hard for exactly 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat immediately.

Step 6: Testing the Set (Time: 2 Minutes, Intensity: Low)

Before jarring, perform a “plate test.” Place a small spoonful of jam on a plate that has been in the freezer. Put it back in the freezer for 1 minute. Push your finger through the jam. If it wrinkles and holds its shape, it is ready. If it runs like liquid, you may need to add a little more pectin and boil again. (Note: Cranberry jam sets quite firmly, so it usually looks slightly softer on the plate than it will in the jar).

Step 7: Jarring and Processing (Time: 10 Minutes, Intensity: Medium)

Remove the spice bag and the orange membrane bag from the pot. Skim off any excess foam from the top of the jam using a metal spoon.

Ladle the hot jam into your sterilized jars, leaving 1/4 inch of headspace at the top. Wipe the rims with a clean, damp cloth to ensure a good seal. Place the lids on and screw the bands until fingertip tight.

To Process: Place the jars in a boiling water canner, ensuring they are covered by at least 1 inch of water. Process for 10 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the jars sit in the water for 5 minutes before removing them to a towel-lined counter to cool. You should hear the satisfying “pop” of the lids sealing as they cool.

Recipe Notes and Variations

- Spicing it Up: If you want a kick, add a pinch of cayenne pepper or a teaspoon of freshly grated ginger along with the other spices.

- The “Christmas” Look: For a deeper red color, you can add 1 tablespoon of red currant

jelly or a few drops of natural food coloring, though the cranberries usually provide a beautiful ruby hue on their own.

- Sweetness Adjustment: Cranberries are naturally tart. If you prefer a sweeter jam, you can increase the granulated sugar to 1.5 cups. Do not reduce the sugar below 1 cup, or the pectin may not set properly.

- Serving Suggestions: Serve this jam with brie and crackers, spread on warm scones, or use it as a glaze for roasted carrots and ham.

Nutrition Information

Please note: The following nutrition information is estimated per serving (1 tablespoon). It is provided as a courtesy and is not a substitute for professional dietary advice.

- Calories: 35 kcal

- Total Carbohydrates: 9g

- Dietary Fiber: 0.5g

- Sugars: 8g

- Protein: 0.1g

- Fat: 0g
- Sodium: 2mg
- Vitamin C: 2% Daily Value (DV)
- Potassium: 15mg