Prep Time	5 minutes
Cook Time	0 minutes (no-cook recipe)
Chill Time	15–20 minutes (optional, for best texture)
Total Time	5–25 minutes
Yield	8–10 servings
Skill Level	Beginner
Intensity Level	Low (no cooking, no special equipment)
Cuisine	Southern American
Course	Appetizer / Party Dip

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Why You’ll Love This Recipe

- Three core ingredients — cream cheese, pepper jelly, and crackers
- No cooking required — perfect for hot kitchens or beginner cooks
- Make-ahead friendly — assemble up to 24 hours in advance
- Customizable heat — mild, medium, or hot pepper jelly all work beautifully
- Crowd-pleaser — sweet, spicy, creamy, and crunchy in every bite

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Ingredients

For the Dip:

- 8 oz (225 g) full-fat cream cheese, softened at room temperature
- ½ cup (120 ml) pepper jelly (mild, medium, or hot — your choice)
- ¼ tsp flaky sea salt (optional, if using unsalted cream cheese)

Optional Garnishes:

- 1 tbsp chopped fresh chives or green onion
- 1 tsp toasted sesame seeds or crushed pecans
- A pinch of red pepper flakes for extra heat

For Serving:

- 1 sleeve buttery round crackers (such as Ritz)
- Toasted baguette slices, pretzel crisps, or celery sticks as alternatives

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Equipment

- Small serving plate or shallow bowl (6–8 inch)
- Butter knife or small offset spatula
- Measuring cups

- Serving knife for spreading

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Soften the Cream Cheese (5 minutes, low intensity)

Remove the cream cheese from the refrigerator and let it sit at room temperature for 15–20 minutes (or microwave unwrapped for 10–15 seconds on 50% power if you're in a hurry). Softened cream cheese spreads more evenly and creates a smoother base.

Step 2: Shape the Base (2 minutes, low intensity)

Place the softened block of cream cheese on your serving plate. Using the back of a spoon or a small offset spatula, press and spread it into a rough 6-inch round, about ½ inch thick. You can leave it rustic and swirled, or smooth it into a neat dome. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt if desired.

Step 3: Add the Pepper Jelly (1 minute, low intensity)

Spoon the pepper jelly evenly over the top of the cream cheese. Spread it gently with the back of the spoon, leaving a ¼-inch border of cream cheese visible around the edge for a pretty presentation. Don't overwork it—swirling slightly looks intentional and appealing.

Step 4: Garnish (1 minute, low intensity)

Scatter chopped chives or green onion over the top. Add toasted sesame seeds or crushed pecans for texture. Finish with a tiny pinch of red pepper flakes if you want extra heat.

Step 5: Chill (15–20 minutes, optional but recommended)

Refrigerate for 15–20 minutes to firm up the cream cheese and let the flavors meld. If you're short on time, serve immediately—it's still delicious.

Step 6: Serve (immediate)

Arrange crackers around the dip and place a small spreading knife in the cream cheese. Invite guests to spread a bit of cream cheese and jelly onto each cracker.

Intensity & Timing Breakdown

Phase	Duration	Intensity	Notes
Softening cream cheese	15–20 min	Low (passive)	Room temperature is best; microwave shortcut works
Shaping base	2 min	Low	Rustic or smooth—your preference
Adding jelly	1 min	Low	Gentle swirl, don't overmix
Garnishing	1 min	Low	Customize freely
Chilling	15–20 min	Low (passive)	Optional; improves texture
Active hands-on time	~5 minutes	Low	Total time depends on chilling

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Recipe Notes & Tips

- Use full-fat cream cheese. Reduced-fat versions are softer and won't hold their shape as well.

- Let the cream cheese soften fully. Cold cream cheese tears crackers and looks lumpy.

- Warm the jelly slightly (10 seconds in the microwave) if it’s stiff and hard to spread.
- Make it ahead: Assemble up to 24 hours in advance, cover, and refrigerate. Add garnishes just before serving.
- Heat level: Pepper jelly ranges from mild to fiery. Taste your jelly first and label it for guests if serving a hot variety.
- Doubling: Use two blocks side by side on a larger platter; increase jelly to 1 cup.

Variations

- Peach & Jalapeño: Use peach-jalapeño jelly for a fruitier twist.
- Habanero Heat: Choose habanero pepper jelly and top with cotija cheese crumbles.
- Herbed: Fold 1 tbsp chopped fresh basil or cilantro into the cream cheese before shaping.
- Nutty: Press 2 tbsp crushed toasted pecans into the cream cheese base before adding jelly.
- Whipped: Beat the cream cheese with 1 tbsp milk until fluffy, then spread and top with jelly.

Storage & Food Safety

- Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to 3 days.
- Do not leave the dip at room temperature for more than 2 hours (1 hour if the room is above 90°F/32°C).
- The cream cheese base can be shaped and refrigerated up to 24 hours ahead; add jelly and garnishes just before serving for the freshest look.

Nutrition Information (Per Serving)

Based on 10 servings, using full-fat cream cheese and including crackers (5 buttery round crackers per serving). Values are estimates.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~180 kcal
Total Fat	12 g
Saturated Fat	6 g
Cholesterol	25 mg
Sodium	150 mg
Total Carbohydrates	16 g
Sugars	9 g
Protein	3 g