Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 35-40 minutes
Total Time: 50 minutes
Servings: Makes about 1 ½ cups (12 servings of 2 tablespoons each)

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Introduction

If you have ever found yourself staring at an overflowing bowl of cherry tomatoes—from your garden, the farmers market, or a generous neighbor—this Small Batch Cherry Tomato Jam is the answer. Sweet, tangy, and slightly savory, this jam transforms humble cherry tomatoes into a glossy, jewel-toned spread that elevates everything it touches. It is the perfect way to preserve the bright flavors of summer in a small, manageable batch that fits in a single saucepan.

Unlike traditional fruit jams, tomato jam has a complex flavor profile that balances sweetness with acidity and a hint of warmth from spices. Spread it on toast with ricotta, swirl it into

yogurt, serve it alongside cheese and crackers, or use it as a glaze for grilled chicken or pork. This recipe makes just enough to enjoy now and share a jar with a friend, without requiring a full day of canning. It is approachable, versatile, and downright delicious—a true pantry treasure that proves small batches can deliver big flavor.

Ingredients

For the Jam:

- 2 lbs cherry or grape tomatoes (about 6 cups), rinsed
- ¾ cup granulated sugar (adjust to taste)
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (about 1 lemon)
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional, for warmth)
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional, for heat)

- 1 sprig fresh rosemary or basil (optional)

For Canning (if preserving):

- 2 half-pint (8 oz) glass canning jars with lids and bands, sterilized
- Large canning pot with a rack
- Jar lifter and funnel
- Bottled lemon juice (1 tablespoon per half-pint jar) — for safe water-bath canning

Equipment

- Large, heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven
- Wooden spoon or spatula
- Potato masher
- Immersion blender (optional, for a smoother texture)
- Canning jars and lids

- Large water-bath canning pot
- Funnel and jar lifter
- Measuring cups and spoons

Instructions

Phase 1: Prep the Ingredients (Time: 10 Minutes | Intensity: Low)

1. Wash the Tomatoes: Rinse the cherry tomatoes thoroughly under cold running water. Remove any stems and discard any bruised or split tomatoes.
2. Halve the Tomatoes: Cut each cherry tomato in half. If you prefer a smoother jam, you can leave them whole and mash them later, but halving helps them break down faster and more evenly.
3. Sterilize the Jars: If you plan to can the jam, wash the jars, lids, and bands in hot, soapy water. Sterilize by boiling in a large pot of water for 10 minutes, or run through a dishwasher on the hottest setting. Keep jars hot until ready to fill.
4. Measure the Ingredients: Have all ingredients measured and ready, as the jam requires occasional stirring but not constant attention.

Phase 2: Cook the Jam (Time: 35-40 Minutes | Intensity: Medium)

1. Combine Ingredients: In a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine the halved cherry tomatoes, sugar, lemon juice, balsamic vinegar, minced garlic, salt, black pepper, cinnamon (if using), and red pepper flakes (if using). Stir to combine.

2. Bring to a Simmer: Place the saucepan over medium heat and bring the mixture to a simmer, stirring occasionally. The tomatoes will begin to release their juices.

3. Mash: Once the tomatoes have softened (about 10 minutes), use a potato masher to crush them to your desired consistency. For a chunky jam, mash lightly; for a smoother jam, mash more thoroughly or use an immersion blender.

4. Reduce: Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 25 to 30 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching. The jam is ready when it has thickened significantly, coats the back of a spoon, and a line drawn through it on a plate holds its shape.

5. Add Herbs: If using, add the rosemary sprig or basil leaves during the last 10 minutes of cooking for a subtle herbal note. Remove before filling the jars.

Phase 3: Test & Adjust (Time: 5 Minutes | Intensity: Low)

1. Test the Set: Place a small plate in the freezer for a few minutes. Spoon a small amount of jam onto the cold plate and return to the freezer for 1 minute. Push your finger through the jam—if it wrinkles and holds its shape, it is ready. If it is too runny, continue simmering for another 5-10 minutes and test again.

2. Taste: Taste the jam and adjust the sweetness, acidity, or spice to your preference. Add a splash more lemon juice for brightness or a pinch more sugar if it is too tart.

Phase 4: Fill the Jars (Time: 10 Minutes | Intensity: Medium-High)

Note: If you are not canning, skip to Phase 5. The jam can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks.

1. Add Lemon Juice: Add 1 tablespoon of bottled lemon juice to the bottom of each sterilized half-pint jar. This ensures the acidity level is safe for water-bath canning.

2. Fill the Jars: Using a funnel, carefully ladle the hot jam into the hot jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace.

3. Remove Air Bubbles: Gently tap the jars on the counter or run a plastic knife around the inside edge to release air bubbles. Wipe the rims clean with a damp cloth.

4. Seal: Place the lids on the jars and tighten the bands until fingertip-tight.

Phase 5: Water-Bath Canning (Time: 15 Minutes | Intensity: Medium-High)

1. Prepare the Water Bath: Fill a large canning pot with water and bring it to a boil. Make sure there is enough water to cover the jars by at least 1 inch.

2. Process: Carefully lower the jars into the boiling water bath using a jar lifter. Process half-pint jars for 15 minutes (adjust for altitude if necessary: add 5 minutes for 1,000-3,000 ft, 10 minutes for 3,000-6,000 ft, and 15 minutes above 6,000 ft).

3. Cool & Check Seals: Remove the jars from the water bath and place them on a towel to cool undisturbed for 12-24 hours. Check the seals by pressing the center of each lid—it should not pop up. If any jars did not seal, refrigerate them and use within 3 weeks.

Phase 6: Serve (Time: 2 Minutes | Intensity: Low)

1. Serve: Spoon the jam onto crostini, swirl it into yogurt, spread it on sandwiches, or serve it alongside cheese and crackers. Enjoy!

Flavor Variations

- Smoky Tomato Jam: Add ½ teaspoon of smoked paprika and a pinch of cayenne pepper for a deep, smoky flavor.

- Herb-Forward: Add 1 teaspoon of chopped fresh thyme or oregano during the last 10 minutes of cooking.

- Sweet & Spicy: Increase the red pepper flakes to ½ teaspoon and add 1 tablespoon of honey for a sweet-heat balance.

- Balsamic-Rosemary: Double the balsamic vinegar and add an extra rosemary sprig for a rich, aromatic jam.

- Low-Sugar: Reduce the sugar to ½ cup and add 1 tablespoon of chia seeds to help thicken the jam naturally.

Nutrition

Note: Nutritional information is an estimate based on 2 tablespoons of jam.

Serving Size: 2 tablespoons
Calories: 55
Total Fat: 0g
Saturated Fat: 0g
Cholesterol: 0mg
Sodium: 85mg
Total Carbohydrates: 14g
Dietary Fiber: 1g
Sugars: 12g
Protein: 1g