



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

## **Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 60 Clear Jel, Sure Jell and Canning Pie Filling**

**Show Notes: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/60](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/60)**

This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #60

**Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh, without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert Theresa Loe.**

**Theresa:** Hey there everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe. This podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm. Now what the heck does that mean? Well, it means enjoying fresh, seasonal flavors through DIY projects like canning, fermenting, and other artisan food crafts. It also means growing some of that food yourself, no matter how small your space. We talk about everything from low sugar jam to backyard chicken keeping. In other words, this podcast and my website are helping you work towards a more flavorful and more sustainable lifestyle one step at a time. If you want to learn more about any of these topics or my online canning courses, just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

Last week's episode was a little bit longer. I think it was the longest episode I've ever had, and it was on backyard beekeeping. I've actually been doing a lot of episodes lately on small space food growing. Well, this week I'm swinging the



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

podcast back into the kitchen and we're talking about canning. It is definitely canning season and the canning questions are rolling in, and I need to start addressing canning on the podcast.

This is sort of a shorter episode. I'm answering a listener question. Actually several. I've been getting a lot of questions about the differences between 2 products that are called out in canning recipes. There's a lot of confusion. Today I'm going to be diving into the difference between these 2 commercial products and how it relates to canning up fruit pie filling. One of these products is used for pie filling and called out all the time, just for that, but otherwise it's not very common in canning. The other product is used for canning all the time.

What I'm talking about here is the difference between Clear Jel and Sure-Jell. Now Clear Jel and Sure-Jell are trademark names of two products that are used in canning in very, very different ways. Now because the names are so similar there is often a lot of confusion between them. I want to clear up the confusion so that you never mix these two up again. I'm going to cover what these two products are, how they're used or not used, and where the heck you would get them. I'll also dive a little deeper into Clear Jel and how you use it for canning up fruit pie filling, which can be a really fun project. I'll also at the end talk about if you even need to add Clear Jel at all. Even though it's called out in the recipe, can you get away with not using it at all? I will answer that at the end of this podcast.

First I'm going to start with Sure-Jell. Now Sure-Jell is spelled with the Jell spelled as J-E-L-L. Sure-Jell is just a commercial pectin that is used in jam and jelly making. Pectin is a natural substance that you can find in a lot of fruit, especially apples and citrus. The way it works is that when pectin is combined with a certain ratio of acid



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

and sugar it creates this chemical reaction and it helps firm up or set or gel the jam or the jelly that you're making.

A lot of people use pectin in their jam recipes. The reason is because it pretty much guarantees your gel will set. If you know anything about me or if you follow me, you know that I personally rarely use pectin. I teach people in my classes how to get the set without commercial pectin. However, I really don't think there's anything wrong with using pectin. It's just that when you make a standard jam or jelly with a standard commercial pectin you end up having to add a lot of sugar.

Now I prefer a different brand. When I do use pectin I use Pomona's Pectin. I don't use Sure-Jell. I've used it in the past but I just prefer Pomona's, mostly because it's more natural and it has no preservatives. The other pectins that are on the market do have preservatives, but that would be a whole another topic. I'll have more information in the show notes of this episode, both on low sugar jams, if you're interested in that, and in Pomona's Pectin. If you want to learn more, you can go to [livinghomegrown.com/60](http://livinghomegrown.com/60). So you just want to go to /60 to get the show notes.

Just so you know Sure-Jell is just one particular brand of pectin. It's used in jam and jelly making. It comes in a box. It has recipes that you can follow, and it does have both a regular and a low sugar variety of pectin to use. It's been around since the 1930s, so it is one of the most common pectins on the market. You can find it pretty much anywhere. You can find it at grocery stores. But Sure-Jell is not meant to be used to make pie filling. Instead what is called out in pie filling recipes is something called Clear Jel.



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

Let me go into what Clear Jel is and how you would use it for pie filling. Now Clear Jel is spelled J-E-L, only with one L, and it is another brand, it is a commercial modified food starch that's used as a thickening agent in canning recipes. It's most commonly used in canning apple pie filling or a lot of other pie fillings. It can be used in canning soup, things like that. It's actually a modified cornstarch, so it's not like regular cornstarch. It is modified so that it is resistant to breaking down under high temperatures and under various pH levels. It has no flavor and it just comes as a white powder.

Why would you want this in your pie filling? Well, the reason that recipes will call out Clear Jel is that it allows you to thicken the pie juices when you make your pie. If you've ever made a homemade pie you know that usually you add some sort of a thickener with the fruit. Like if you're making an apple pie you have your spices, your sliced apple, and then you add some kind of a thickener like arrowroot or flour. That is added so that as that fruit cooks in the pie, and the juices are released, the thickener will cause those juices to thicken up and you'll get the pie like consistency. Otherwise when you slice the pie all the juices run out.

If you decide you want to can up some pie filling, the recipe usually calls for Clear Jel as the thickener in that particular recipe. Now the advantage of Clear Jel is that it's able to thicken the food evenly without any lumps and when it's subjected to the sustained temperatures of the canning process, whether it's water bath canning or pressure canning, whenever the Clear Jel is subjected to a canning process, it does not lump up. When it's used in pie filling and you later open up that jar and you pour that pie filling into a pie crust to bake it, it will bake into this beautiful pie with just the right amount of thickening and you never even know that



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

it's there. So you can see why Clear Jel is in the pie and why people want it. It actually has nothing to do with the safety of the canned product.

Just a note about Clear Jel. If you ever go to buy it there is regular Clear Jel and there is instant Clear Jel. For canning you generally want to stick with regular Clear Jel because instant, and it's always marked if it is instant, it will clearly say instant. The instant Clear Jel sometimes doesn't work as well for long canning processes. It tends to break down when it's heated over long periods of time. But the reason that they've made the instant Clear Jel is so that it can thicken foods without heat. It can make a room temperature sauce thicken up really fast. That's the purpose of the instant Clear Jel. But if you are going to be making this for pie filling, usually what you're looking for is regular Clear Jel, not the instant.

Also, I should let you know that regular Clear Jel is not marked as a non-GMO corn product. There is another brand of thickener called Ultra Gel and it is marked as a non-GMO. However, it's an instant. Even though it says on the package that it can be used for canning, I have not personally tested it, so I can't recommend that as an alternative. But you could certainly give it a shot, and if you do, report back to me and let me know if it worked for you.

I know you may be thinking this in your head so let's just address it here. You might be thinking, "What would happen if I mix up a pie filling and I just add a regular thickener? What would happen when I process that jar in the water bath canner?" Well, although using something like cornstarch or tapioca or even flour in your canned pie filling would be perfectly safe to do, you won't be very happy with the results. What happens with those thickeners is they tend to gum up or get really lumpy during the heating process when you are processing those jars in the water bath. Other times



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

they gum up while they're sitting on the shelf. Either way, later when you go to open up that jar to make your pie, you have this lumpy gummy mess inside the jar. But from a safety standpoint the pie filling is perfectly safe to eat. It's just texturally it's kind of messed up.

But fear not because this is what you can do. You can make up a regular pie filling and can it up. Just follow the directions as you normally would, and just leave out the Clear Jel altogether. When you do that, it allows you to make up the jar and then later when you do pull that jar up off the shelf and you go to make the pie, that is when you can add a traditional thickener, like tapioca or cornstarch or flour. You just add it to the mixture before you bake the pie. Really simple to do.

What I do and what I tell my students to do is just make up the pie filling as you normally would, but mark the jars that there is no thickener in that recipe so that you don't forget. Then that way you can be sure to just add a thickener, right when you bake the pie. What I do is I pour the filling into a bowl, I mix in some thickener, a few tablespoons of flour or cornstarch, and then I put it into the pie crust and bake it. Pretty simple solution and you don't have to try and track down Clear Jel and you don't have to use Clear Jel if you are not interested in it because it is not marked as a non-GMO product.

Now another question that I usually get at this point from my students is, "Okay, how much of a thickener should I add when I do pull that jar off of the shelf?" So in a typical pie recipe you would just add what you would add normally if you were remaking that recipe fresh. That can vary a little bit depending upon is it a cherry pie recipe, or is it an apple pie recipe, or a peach pie recipe. So it can vary a little, but on average it usually means





Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

stirring in 1 to 2 tablespoons of flour at baking time. That would be for a 9-inch pie. Now you can always just not add any thickener at all and you just end up with a little bit of a juicy runny pie, but it's not the end of the world. It still tastes wonderful. You don't have to thicken it if you don't want to.

That brings us to where in the heck do you get this Clear Jel, because it's not something that's typically found in the stores. And that is correct. You will not typically find Clear Jel in the grocery store. You usually only find it online or at a really well-stocked canning supply store. But for the most part it is not something that's always sitting on the shelf because people do not typically use it because it's mostly used for making apple pie filling or other pie filling. But it is very easy to get online, and I will have links in the show notes of this episode so you can get it online.

Just to recap to make sure that I didn't confuse you even further. Sure Jell is a pectin that is used for making jams and jellies. You can buy it in a box, just about anywhere, but is not used for pie filling. Clear Jel is a modified food starch that you can buy online or at a well-stocked canning supply company, and it is used as a thickener mostly for canned pie fillings. It is a modified cornstarch, and if you use the brand Clear Jel, that is the brand name, it does not say that it is non-GMO.

If you don't want to use it because of the possibility of it being a GMO cornstarch, then I would recommend not using Clear Jel at all and just canning up your pie filling without a thickener. You could also do this if you can't find it. Then just using a standard normal thickener off of your pantry shelf that you would use in a regular pie filling like flour or tapioca or arrowroot, something like that. Okay?



Live Farm Fresh Without the Farm™

That sums it up in a nutshell as to what the differences are between Clear Jel and Sure-Jell. I hope that helped and didn't confuse you more. If you have any questions you can always check the show notes for this episode and you can leave a comment there, and I'd be happy to answer it for you.

The show notes for this episode are at [livinghomegrown.com/60](http://livinghomegrown.com/60). There you will find links and information for where to buy these products. I'll also include information on how to make low sugar jams and jellies and Pomona Pectin which I mentioned earlier, if you're interested in that. I will have a link to a recipe for making apple pie filling if you want to give it a go. I hope that helps you. That should get you well on your way if you want to give this a shot.

That's it for this week. Thanks so much for joining me here today. I really appreciate that you took time out of your busy day to join me here. Until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

**Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com) to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown Podcast.**