

Grape Juice

Grape juice is rather easy to can. Grapes are one of the higher-acid fruits and hot grape juice only needs to be processed 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Prepare the juice by placing the grapes in a saucepan and adding boiling water to cover the grapes. Heat and simmer slowly until grape skins are soft, about 30 minutes. Strain through a damp jelly bag or double layers of cheesecloth.

During storage, white crystals often form in the bottom of the jar. They are tartrate crystals and are harmless. However, you can prevent tartrate crystals by allowing the prepared juice to stand 24 to 48 hours in the refrigerator. Without mixing, pour off the top of the grape juice, being careful not to disturb the crystals in the bottom of the container. Discard the sediment. Straining juice through a coffee filter yields a clear juice.

Reheat the strained grape juice until the juice begins to boil before pouring into hot sterilized jars. Allow ¼-inch headspace. Process pints and quarts for 5 minutes and half-gallons for 10 minutes. Grape juice and apple juice are the only products approved for canning in half-gallon jars. (Note: jars need to be sterilized anytime a product is processed for less than 10 minutes. To sterilize jars, cover jars with water and boil them for 10 minutes. If you live at an altitude above 1,000 feet, boil the jars an additional minute for each 1,000 feet of additional altitude.)

Sweeten the juice to taste before the final heating. Sugar is not needed to preserve the grape juice but may be added for flavor.

What causes grape juice to ferment? This is likely the result of yeasts that were not killed during heating and processing. Grapes are high in yeasts and the peel is not removed as in some fruit. The processing of grape juice is only killing organisms in the headspace and providing a firm seal. Heating the juice adequately before pouring it into the jar is essential for destroying microorganisms.

Grape juice can also be frozen. To freeze grape juice, prepare the juice by crushing the grapes, adding 1 cup water per gallon of crushed grapes, and simmering for 10 minutes. Strain the juice as for canned grape juice above and allow to stand overnight in the refrigerator for tartrate crystals to settle to the bottom. Pour off the clear juice. Pour juice into containers, leaving adequate head space – ½ inch per pint and 1 inch per quart in containers with wide top openings, and 1 ½ inches for pints and quarts in jars with narrow top openings. The liquid will expand when frozen requiring the high amount of head space. If more tartrate crystals form in the frozen juice, remove them by straining the juice after it thaws.