

Robert Lambert: Spiced Crab Apples

The ideal here is Whitney crabs, small and delicate and ripe all at once—they don't keep or travel well, so are hard to come by if you don't have a tree. Any small apple will do, however, this is about the syrup and the spices.

Yield: about 12 wide-mouth pint jars, though anyone who does canning knows matching up the amounts of fruit and syrup can be a fool's quest...

10 lbs crab apples

2½ cups cider vinegar

5 cups sugar

10 cups apple juice

5 cinnamon sticks, 3"

tie in cheesecloth:

½ tsp. cloves

½ tsp. allspice berries

½ tsp. cardamom pods

2 heads star anise

Combine syrup ingredients with spices, boil then simmer covered over low heat for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, sort, wash, and pierce each apple through the core with a large needle—this is critical! As the apples are heated the air and juice inside the skin expands, and unless there's a way out the fruit will explode and collapse. It's also an avenue for the syrup to enter the fruit as it cools and sucks liquid back in through the hole.



Bring syrup back to a full boil and add the apples, in batches if necessary, for between 3 and 6 minutes, depending on the firmness of the fruit—Whitney's being on the low end, Lady apples on the high. Scoop out and spread on sheet pans to cool. Cover and remove syrup from heat.



Pack apples into pint jars as soon as you can handle them, wedging them into place but not too tightly. Bring the syrup back to boiling and fill the jars, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ " head room, top with lids and rims.



Process in a boiling water bath with at least 2 " over the lids for 8 minutes, do not remove from the water! This is critical. Remove the pot from heat, remove the cover but allow the jars to cool in the water bath for at least 40 minutes. If taken out too soon they will sputter and hiss and expel their liquids, making a mess and leaving the fruit high and dry. Trust me.

Once out, cool completely on towel-lined trays, then remove rims and wipe down jars with a damp cloth before storing in a cool dark place. Best to allow them to mature for several weeks before using. They will keep for up to 3 years. As you use the apples, use the syrup in marinades, sauces, reduced as a ham glaze...? Hmmm...