GENERAL

red onion marmalade recipe jamie oliver

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Jamie Oliver’s Red Onion Marmalade: A Sweet and Savory Delight

When you think of marmalade, images of orange zest and citrus tang usually come to mind. But what if you could turn the deep, caramelised flavor of red onions into a spread that brightens toast, complements cheeses, or adds a punch to a roast? Jamie Oliver’s red onion marmalade recipe does just that. It’s a testament to his knack for turning humble, everyday ingredients into extraordinary dishes, blending sweet, salty, and umami in a single jar.

In this comprehensive guide, we’ll walk you through the origins of onion marmalade, why red onions are the star of the show, the essential ingredients and equipment, step-by by step instructions, creative variations, serving ideas, and storage tips. By the end, you’ll have the confidence to create a jar of glossy, flavourful marmalade that’s as versatile as it is delicious.

The Story Behind Red Onion Marmalade

A Tradition of Sweetening the Savory

Marmalade has long been associated with citrus fruits, but the concept of sweetening vegetables is not new. In the 18th and 19th centuries, cooks in Europe began preserving onions, carrots, and even beets in sugar and vinegar, creating early versions of what we now call “sweetened onions” or “caramelised onion jam.” These preparations were prized for their ability to add depth to meats, cheeses, and breads.

Jamie Oliver’s Twist

Jamie Oliver, known for his approachable yet inventive cooking, has always celebrated the idea that great flavor can come from simple, fresh ingredients. His red onion marmalade recipe emerged from a desire to showcase how red onions, with their natural sweetness and vibrant colour, can be transformed into a spread that balances sweetness with a subtle sharpness. The result is a versatile condiment that can be used on everything from croissants to grilled chicken.

Why Red Onions?

Colour and Sweetness

Red onions contain anthocyanins—natural pigments that give them a deep purplish hue. When cooked slowly, these pigments break down, releasing a mellow sweetness that is far less pronounced than that of sweet onions or shallots. The result is a marmalade that carries a bright, almost ruby red colour, making it visually striking.

Rich Flavor Profile

Unlike the sharp bite of raw onions, red onions develop a nutty, caramelised flavor when cooked. They also have a slightly fruity undertone that pairs beautifully with the acidity of vinegar and the richness of butter, the core ingredients in Jamie Oliver’s recipe.

Seasonal Availability

Red onions are typically harvested in late summer and early autumn, making them a perfect ingredient for a seasonal spread that can be stored for months. Their robust flavour also means they can stand up to long cooking

times without losing their character.

Ingredients: A Balanced Palette

- 1 /kg red onions (peeled and finely sliced)
- 200 /g unsalted butter (softened)
- 200 /g dark brown sugar
- 60 /ml white wine vinegar
- 1 /tsp sea salt
- 1 /tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 /tsp smoked paprika (optional, for a subtle smoky note)
- 1 /tsp fresh thyme leaves (or 1 /tsp dried thyme)
- 1 /tsp fresh rosemary, finely chopped (optional)
- 1 /tsp lemon zest (for brightness)
- 1 /tsp Dijon mustard (for a hint of tang)

Feel free to adjust the sweetness or acidity to suit your palate. If you prefer a more tart marmalade, increase the vinegar slightly. For a richer, more caramelised taste, add a tablespoon of honey or maple syrup.

Equipment You'll Need

- Large, heavy bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven
- Wooden spoon or heat resistant spatula
- Thermometer (optional, but handy for checking consistency)
- Glass jars with airtight lids (sterilised)
- Long tipped spoon or ladle for filling jars
- Large bowl for rinsing and draining onions (optional)

Step by Step: Jamie Oliver's Red Onion Marmalade

1. Prep the Onions

Peel the red onions and slice them thinly, about 1–2 mm thick. Thin slices ensure even cooking and a smoother texture. If you prefer a finer marmalade, you can finely dice the onions after slicing.

2. Melt the Butter

Place the butter in a large saucepan over low heat. Allow it to melt slowly, stirring occasionally. Once melted, add the sliced onions and stir to coat them evenly with the butter.

3. Cook on Low Heat

Reduce the heat to the lowest setting. Cook the onions gently, stirring frequently to prevent sticking or burning. The low heat is key—it allows the onions to release their natural sugars without browning too quickly.

4. Add Sugar and Seasonings

When the onions begin to soften and look translucent, sprinkle in the dark brown sugar, sea salt, black pepper, smoked paprika, thyme, rosemary, lemon zest, and Dijon mustard. Stir until the sugar dissolves and the mixture starts to thicken.

5. Introduce Vinegar

Pour in the white wine vinegar. The acidity will balance the sweetness and help the marmalade set. Stir well and let

the mixture simmer gently.

6. Slow Simmer and Reduce

Allow the mixture to simmer for 45–60 minutes, or until it has thickened to a jam like consistency. Stir often, scraping the bottom of the pan to prevent scorching. If you're using a thermometer, aim for a final temperature of about 104–110 °C (220–230 °F). The marmalade should be thick enough to coat the back of a spoon but still pourable when you lift the spoon.

7. Test Consistency

To check if the marmalade is ready, place a small spoonful on a chilled plate. Let it sit for a minute; if it sets and does not slide off the spoon, it's ready. If it's too runny, continue simmering for another 10–15 minutes.

8. Sterilise Jars

While the marmalade cooks, sterilise the glass jars. Place them in a pot of boiling water for 10 minutes, then dry them on a clean towel. This step is essential for preserving the marmalade safely.

9. Transfer to Jars

Using a ladle or long tipped spoon, carefully fill each jar with the hot marmalade, leaving about 1 cm of headspace. Wipe the rims clean, seal with the lids, and immediately place them in a pot of boiling water for 5 minutes to create a vacuum seal.

10. Cool and Store

Remove the jars from the water and let them cool undisturbed on a towel. Once cooled, label with the date. Store in a cool, dark place for up to 6 months. Once opened, keep refrigerated and use within a month.

Creative Variations

1. Sweet Spicy Marmalade

For a fiery kick, add a finely diced red chili or a pinch of cayenne pepper to the onions before cooking. The heat pairs beautifully with the caramelised sweetness.

2. Herb Infused Marmalade

Swap the thyme and rosemary for basil or oregano for a Mediterranean twist. Adding fresh bay leaves during cooking also imparts subtle depth.

3. Citrus Enhanced Marmalade

Incorporate a tablespoon of orange zest and a splash of fresh orange juice. The citrus brightens the flavor profile and complements the natural sweetness of the onions.

4. Vegan Marmalade

Replace the butter with a plant based butter or coconut oil. Use a vegan dark brown sugar or maple syrup to maintain sweetness.

Serving Suggestions

- Toast and Cheese: Spread a spoonful on toasted sourdough and top with brie or goat cheese. Add a drizzle of honey for extra sweetness.
- Charcuterie Board: Pair with cured meats, nuts, and fresh fruit. The marmalade's sweet savory balance complements salty meats beautifully.

- Grilled Meats: Use as a glaze for chicken, pork, or lamb. The marmalade caramelises on the grill, creating a sticky, flavourful coating.
- Vegetable Dishes: Swirl into roasted vegetable medleys or use as a finishing sauce for sautéed mushrooms.
- Breakfast Spread: Spread on pancakes, waffles, or French toast. The sweet savory profile adds a gourmet twist to morning meals.

Storage and Shelf Life

When properly processed in sterilised jars, Jamie Oliver's red onion marmalade can last up to six months in a cool, dark pantry. The high sugar content and acidic environment inhibit bacterial growth. Once opened, refrigerate and consume within a month for optimal taste and safety.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use sweet onions instead of red onions?

While sweet onions will produce a sweeter marmalade, they lack the deep colour and subtle fruity undertones of red onions. For a classic look and balanced flavor, stick with red onions.

Is the marmalade safe to eat without canning?

If you prefer not to process the marmalade, you can keep it in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. However, for long term storage, proper canning is essential.

What's the best way to check if the marmalade has set?

Perform the "plate test": place a small spoonful on a chilled plate, let it sit for a minute, and observe if it thickens. If it still runs, continue cooking.

Can I make a larger batch?

Yes, simply scale up the ingredients proportionally. Ensure you have a large enough pot and enough sterilised jars to accommodate the increased volume.

Conclusion

Jamie Oliver's red onion marmalade is more than a recipe; it's an invitation to explore the harmony between sweet and savory. By harnessing the natural sugars of red onions and balancing them with butter, sugar, vinegar, and aromatic herbs, you create a spread that's as visually stunning as it is delicious. Whether you're looking to elevate a simple sandwich, add depth to a charcuterie board, or experiment with creative variations, this marmalade offers endless possibilities.

Next time you're in the kitchen, grab a bag of

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