The swap: Store-bought fruit topping → Homemade cherry compote

Sweet-Tart Cherry Compote with Honey & Lemon

By Angie Hayman

Sweet, tart, and just a little indulgent! This homemade cherry compote transforms dried tart cherries into a rich, glossy topping with honey, lemon, and a hint of cinnamon. Perfect for Brie, yogurt, toast, and charcuterie boards.



PREP	COOK	TOTAL	SERVINGS	DIFFICULTY	CALORIES
5 min	25-30	~25 min	12 (estimated)	Easy	~35 est. per serving

Sauces · American · Vegetarian · Gluten-free · Dairy-free

Approximate Nutrition

Estimated

Per serving (about 2 tablespoons)

~35	~0.1g	~9g	~0g	~0.4g	~7g	~5mg
CALORIES	PROTEIN	CARBS	FAT	FIBER	SUGAR	SODIUM

Nutrition information is an approximation and may vary depending on the brands and products used, exact ingredient quantities, and portion sizes.

Ingredients

Makes 12 (estimated) · about 2 tablespoons

- [ ] **¾ cup** sweetened dried tart cherries
- [ ] **¾ cup** water
- [ ] **1 tablespoon** plus 1 teaspoon honey
- [ ] **1 tablespoon** fresh lemon juice
- [ ] **½ teaspoon** lemon zest
- [ ] **⅛ teaspoon** ground cinnamon
- [ ] **2** tiny pinches salt

Ingredient note: I used sweetened dried tart cherries for this recipe, not fresh or unsweetened cherries. Because they already contain added sugar, I started with just 1 tablespoon of honey and added another teaspoon after tasting. The finished compote was perfectly balanced, sweet enough without losing that lovely tart cherry flavor. If using unsweetened dried cherries, you may need to adjust the honey to taste. Different brands of dried cherries can vary in sweetness.

Instructions

1 Prepare the Cherries

Measure 3/4 cup sweetened dried tart cherries. Zest and juice the lemon.

2 Combine the Ingredients

Add the dried cherries and 3/4 cup water to a small saucepan.

Stir in 1 tablespoon honey, 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, 1/2 teaspoon lemon zest, 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon, and one tiny pinch of salt.

3 Simmer Until Softened

Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over medium heat.

Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for approximately 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

The cherries should become plump and tender as the liquid reduces into a glossy, spoonable sauce.

4 Taste and Adjust

Taste the compote once the cherries have softened.

Add the remaining 1 teaspoon honey and a second tiny pinch of salt, stirring until incorporated.

The finished compote should taste sweet and tart, with neither flavor overpowering the other.

5 Cool and Serve

Remove the saucepan from the heat and allow the compote to cool slightly.

Transfer to a serving bowl. The sauce will thicken a little more as it cools.

Serve with Brie, spread over toast, or spoon over Greek yogurt.

Calorie Hacker Tip: A little of this intensely flavored compote goes a long way! Pair it with a small portion of Brie for a sweet, savory, and tangy bite.

Big Cherry Flavor. Just Enough Sweetness.

The Calorie Hack

Not every calorie hack means replacing an ingredient. Sometimes it's about knowing when enough is enough! For this compote, I let the tart cherries bring the flavor, added just enough honey to balance their tanginess, and skipped the heavy-handed sweetness. The result is a rich, glossy cherry topping that tastes indulgent without needing a long list of ingredients.

Traditional approach	Our Calorie Hack
~~Generous added sugar~~	✓ **A measured 1 tbsp + 1 tsp honey**
~~Heavy, syrupy sweetness~~	✓ **A sweet-tart balance that lets the cherries shine**
~~Extra-thick sugary syrup~~	✓ **Naturally thickened by simmering the fruit**

Why it works

- Dried tart cherries have a concentrated fruit flavor, so a little goes a long way. As they simmer, they absorb water, soften, and release natural sugars and soluble fiber that help create a glossy sauce.
- A small amount of honey balances the tartness without overwhelming it, while lemon juice and zest keep everything bright. Cinnamon adds a subtle warmth.
- The result is a flavorful topping that can be used in small portions, especially alongside rich foods like Brie.
- ****Calorie Hacker Tip:** ** The dried cherries we used were already sweetened, so this isn't a sugar-free or low-sugar recipe. The hack is controlling how much additional sweetener goes into the saucepan.

Make It a Meal

One serving: ~35 cal

This little jar of sweet-tart goodness is more versatile than you might think! Spoon it over breakfast, pair it with something savory, or add it to a snack board. A tablespoon brings plenty of flavor, so you don't need much to make an ordinary bite feel special.

- **Plain nonfat Greek yogurt** **+~100 cal**
  About 3/4 cup of creamy, protein-rich yogurt.
- **Brie cheese** **+~95 cal**
  One ounce of Brie paired with the cherry compote.
- **Whole-grain toast** **+~100 cal**
  One slice of toasted whole-grain bread.

- **Cottage cheese +~90 cal**
  About 1/2 cup of low-fat cottage cheese.
- **Oatmeal +~150 cal**
  1/2 cup dry oats, cooked with water.

Illustrative estimates. Actual calories depend on portions, ingredients, and dressing.

Angie's Kitchen Notes

What we learned making it

1. ****A Little Extra Honey Made All the Difference:** I started with one tablespoon of honey, but the cherries needed just a little more sweetness. One additional teaspoon was the sweet spot. The finished compote was still wonderfully tart, just sweet enough without being sugary.**
2. ****Don't Rush the Simmer:** Giving the dried cherries about 15–20 minutes to gently simmer allowed them to plump up and release their flavor into the sauce. What started as dried fruit and water turned into a beautiful, glossy compote.**
3. ****A Tiny Pinch of Salt Matters:** Two tiny pinches of salt helped round out the flavors without making anything taste salty. Sometimes the smallest adjustments make the biggest difference.**
4. ****Taste Before Calling It Done:** This was a good reminder that recipes aren't always perfect on the first taste. A little adjusting turned a simple handful of dried cherries into something Curt and I both loved.**

Storage & Reheating

- **Refrigerator:** Store cooled cherry compote in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.
- **Freezer:** Freeze in a freezer-safe container or individual portions for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator.
- **Reheating:** Enjoy chilled, at room temperature, or gently warmed in a small saucepan over low heat. Add a teaspoon or two of water if the compote has thickened during storage.
- **Food safety:** Refrigerate within 2 hours of cooking. Always use a clean spoon when serving.

Leftover safety, the USDA way: Refrigerate within 2 hours · Enjoy within 3–4 days · Freeze for up to 3–4 months · Reheat to 165°F. USDA: Leftovers and Food Safety: fsis.usda.gov

Hack It Again

Cook once, eat twice

Turn the leftovers into tomorrow's lunch. Less waste, less money, less thinking.

- **Breakfast Upgrade**
  Swirl a tablespoon into plain Greek yogurt or spoon it over warm oatmeal for a sweet-tart breakfast.

- **Brie & Cherry Bites**
  Spread a little Brie on a cracker and top with cherry compote for an easy appetizer.
- **Marlon's Sweet & Spicy Bite**
  Layer peppered salami, Brie, cherry compote, and a jalapeño slice. This combination was taste-tested and approved at our family snack board night!
- **Savory Sandwich Spread**
  Add a thin layer to a turkey and Brie sandwich for a sweet-savory twist.
- **Dessert Shortcut**
  Warm a spoonful and serve over vanilla frozen yogurt or a small scoop of ice cream.

Real Food. Simple Swaps. Healthier Plates.

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