

# Yes you can

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on pressure canners will be a welcome relief. She says that the design problem responsible for those fears was corrected decades ago. Today, all pressure canners must by federal regulation have either a safety valve or fuse. And newer, weighted gauge models offer additional safety because pressure is released each time the gauge jiggles or rocks during the processing.

A pressure canner is a must if you plan to can low-acid foods such as most vegetables, meats, or combinations of foods such as soups or sauces safely. Use of the pressure canner makes it possible to get higher temperatures, thus reducing the heat processing time. The pressure canner is a heavy, deep kettle with a rack in the bottom and a tight-fitting lid that locks into place when in use. Pressure is built up inside the canner so the internal temperature is higher than the temperature of boiling water. A gasket fits between the canner and the lid so pressure can be built up inside the canner. At 10 pounds of pressure, the temperature is 240° F.

An air vent, sometimes called the petcock, is an important part of the pressure canner. This makes it possible for the air inside the canner to escape from the canner as it is replaced with steam when the canner is heated. After the air is exhausted through the vent, the vent is closed either with a weight put over it or with a flip-type or screw-type valve. Then with additional heat, the pressure inside the canner is brought up to the desired pressure of 10 pounds. By controlling the heat under the canner you can maintain this pressure for the recommended processing time.

Canners have two types of gauges, a dial gauge or a weighted gauge. The dial gauge indicates the pressure while the weighted gauge actually controls it. Both have an air vent to allow air inside the canner to escape and be replaced with steam.

Canners vary in size, capacity and price. Small-sized, 4



The sunshine and bounty of summer preserved and waiting on shelves for the family's meals is a gorgeous sight on long winter days.

quart canners, 7 pints, are less expensive and are best suited for canners who preserve only small quantities of food, Marcell says. Medium sized canners, 7 quarts or 10 pints, are the most popular for the average family. Large-sized canners, 7 quarts or 20 pints, have disadvantages as they are extremely heavy when fully loaded and may be too tall to fit between the range unit and the hood or overhead cabinet, she says. Additionally, they require longer exhaust and cooling times.

### Putting a lid on food spoilage

If you've canned before and are planning on using leftover lids or have been given some to use, Trudy Dougherty of the Center County extension office suggests you think twice. According to her, most lid gaskets have a rough textured rubber seal which if stored in a cool dry

place can be good for up to three years after manufacture. Lids with a smooth latex rubber seal tend to dry out faster and should not be kept more than one year. Trudy says one problem consumers face is that they usually don't know when the lid was manufactured. For best results she recommends you discard any lids from years past especially if they were stored in the kitchen or some other warm place, and start over with new lids, preferably dated ones to avoid disappointment.

Food that looks clean may not be clean enough when you're canning, Marcell says. The soil in which the produce grows contains some of the most difficult to kill bacteria that exists. In order to remove the hidden grime you need to wash them gently but thoroughly in as many changes of water as it takes to get a clear rinse water. In addition, it's important to peel root crops. The rough texture on the outer layer of these crops can hold many bacteria that even washing can't remove.

Removing the skins from fruits such as apples, peaches, pears and apricots is equally important, Marcell says. Not only do you remove any pesticide residue that might still be on the fruits, but you remove any hidden bacteria as well. For any food, proper washing includes a gentle but thorough washing in several changes of water before removing seeds, skins, caps, stems, cores or pits. Washing means lifting the foods up and out of the rinse water, not allowing them to drain in the sink or pan and washing them until the rinse water is clear. After the final rinse, treat the food to prevent darkening if necessary.

Hot packing is recommended by Trudy for filling canning jars. Using this method, you bring foods to a boil or cook uncovered for a specified time, pack hot into jars and then heat process. "It's an extra step that is really essential, because hot pack helps remove bacteria prior to canning. Hot pack not only gives you a safer product; you get more food per jar, fewer unsealed lids and a better-looking product," she says. One caution, if you're interrupted before continuing the processing and the food cools, it's best to bring it back to boiling before continuing the processing.

### Free canning booklet is only a phone call away

The Penn State Extension office in your county has available a Home Canning guide, packed with information on almost any food you'd care to process. Written by Louise Hamilton, professor of foods and nutrition for the extension service and Gerald Kuhn, professor of food science, the manual stresses safety. But best of all, it's free. Just ask for Home Canning Circular 569.

### Newer vegetables' processing explained

Trudy has some suggestions for canning some of the newer vegetables, such as Manaluci tomatoes and Sugar Snap Peas. She says that while the packet for Manaluci tomato seeds sometimes carries a warning not to can the tomato, "research shows there's no reason for this. In fact, the USDA has included Manaluci tomatoes on its list of tomatoes suitable for canning."

Trudy suggests you use the hot pack method of filling jars and use safe modern canning techniques, using only high quality tomatoes.

However, Sugar Snap Peas must be handled carefully to retain their flavor, appearance and texture. Trudy recommends freezing rather than canning the peas since they are especially sensitive to high heat, and overcooking or the high temperatures required for canning will cause the pods to fall apart. Only two minutes over medium heat is desirable when preparing this tender vegetable.

To freeze Sugar Snap Peas, string the peas and blanch for 1-1/2 minutes. No seasoning is required, simply lay the

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