



**Family Living
Focus**
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Canning Updates

It's that time of year again to consider what you are going to do with your garden excess. You can eat it now, give the extra to everyone you know or process it for use this winter. Canning is one of three options for processing, the others are freezing and dehydrating. In today's column we will look at the latest information using the canning option. Grandmother's method of heating the food and placing it into sterilized jars (open kettle canning) is not an acceptable method even for jams and jellies. All canned foods need to be processed after the food is placed in jars.

The two safe methods for home canning preservation are the boiling water bath and the pressure canner method. The method is determined by the food you are preserving. All low-acid foods (vegetables and meats) must be processed in a pressure canner. High acid foods (fruits and tomatoes), high sugar foods (jams and jellies) and pickled foods can be canned using the hot water bath.

What you need when canning:
•Start with top quality food; canning doesn't improve the quality of the food.

•Use only standard, modern canning jars.

•Check the rim of the jars for any nicks, even a very minor imperfection can cause seal failure.

•Use the two piece lid consisting of a metal screw band and lid with sealing compound around the circumference. Purchase new lids each year as the sealing compound may be damaged during storage. The metal bands are reusable as long as they are in good condition.

•Use the correct method and canner for the type of food you are processing.

There are two methods for preparing food for the jars — raw (cold) pack and hot pack. Raw pack is the fastest method as you pack the raw food into the jar and cover with boiling liquid (water or sugar syrup). An advantage of the hot pack method is that you can get more food in the jars. Use the liquid that you cook the food in as the liquid in the jar. The hot pack also reduces the air in the food and keeps the foods from "floating."

Using a plastic or wooden spoon, run along the inside of the jar to remove trapped air. Don't use a metal knife as it might make scratches on the jar which will weaken the jar and could cause breakage during the canning process. Be sure to allow the recommended "head space" (space allowed at the top of the jar without liquid) listed in the recipe. The head space will vary depending on the method — pressure canning using the raw pack requires the largest amount of head space. Failure to follow recipe recommendations can result in broken jars and failed seals if liquid or food is forced out of the jar during the processing. Clean the rim of the jar with a damp paper towel to remove liquid or food particles before placing a hot lid on the top of the jar. Turn on the screw band till tight; don't over tighten or leave too loose.

Steps for boiling water bath used for high acid foods, jams and jellies and pickled foods.
•Fill canner half-full of water

and heat to warm for raw packed food or hot packed foods.

•Place jars in canner in a rack that allows water to circulate around the jars.

•Add boiling water if needed so jars are covered with at least one inch of water over the jars.

•Turn heat to high and bring water to a boil. Start counting the processing time when the water starts to boil. The heat can be reduced but be sure it continues to boil all the time; dropping below the boiling point interrupts the processing.

•When the jars have been processed the required time, turn off the heat and remove the jars to a cooling rack.

It takes about 20 to 30 minutes for the water in a canner of jars to come to a boil. You then have to allow the correct time for the food you are processing. You can remove the jars immediately when the time is completed.

Steps for using the pressure canner for low acid foods — vegetables and meats. There are two types of pressure canners — the dial gauge or the weighted gauge. The dials needs to be checked for accuracy each year. Call your local Cooperative Extension office to arrange to have our gauge checked. If the gauge reads too low you will be overprocessing your food but if the gauge reads too high you will be underprocessing the food and your product will not be safe to use.

•Place two to three inches of hot water in the canner and place filled jars in the jar rack. Fasten the canner lid securely.

•Leave the weight off or the petcock open until steam escapes for 10 minutes. This is a very important step. Air that is not forced out of the canner during this process lowers the temperature reached at 5, 10 or 15 pounds of pressure resulting in underprocessing.

•After steam has escaped for 10 minutes close the petcock or place the weigh on the canner. Watch the gauge and bring the pressure to the recipe recommendation.

•Start timing the process when

the pressure reading on the dial reaches the recommendation or the weighted gauge begins to jiggle.

•Regulate the heat to maintain a steady pressure. Quick and/or large pressure variations during processing may cause unnecessary liquid losses from jars.

•When processing time is completed, turn off the heat and remove canner from heat. Do not force-cool the canner. Cooling the canner with cold running water or opening the vent before the canner is fully depressurized will cause loss of liquid from jars, seal failures and may cause jars to break.

•When the vent lock drops to the normal position you can open the lid and remove the jars to a cooling rack.

The pressure canner method requires 12 to 15 minutes of heating before it begins to vent; another 10 minutes to vent the canner and about 5 minutes to pressurize the canner. The processing time is started at this point. The cooling period varies from 20 to 60 minutes depending on jar size, jar numbers and the product being processed. Remember to cool jars from either process in a draft free area and separate jars from each other so air can circulate around them.

Canning is an exact science and it's essential that you use up-to-date recommendations and follow

the recipes exactly. Each approved recipe is tested using the specific ingredient and the specified amount of the ingredient. Changing the ingredients or adjusting the amount of an ingredient in a recipe will alter the acidity of the recipe making the processing time invalid.

Canning is a time consuming process and there really aren't any shortcuts. Each season, methods surface claiming there are faster ways to preserve your food, none of these are safe. Do not use your oven, microwave or dishwasher as a canner. The steam canner method that is not pressurized is also unsafe. Adding aspirin to food is sometimes recommended as a substitute for processing, this is an unsafe practice since there isn't any heat to force the air out of the jar to achieve a vacuum seal.

Be sure to follow canning recipes and recommendations exactly to ensure a safe food-product. You can purchase the USDA canning book from your Cooperative Extension office for \$6.50. You can also have your pressure canner gauge checked, just make an appointment with your local office. If you have questions about recipes you have used for years, call the extension office to check if it follows the latest recommendations.

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