



Hundreds of jars filled with seasonal fruits, vegetables, venison, chicken, beef, turkey, and baby food line the basement shelves of the Steagers' East Petersburg home. Lynette is always searching for new

recipes. This year's collection includes nine varieties of pickles, watermelon rind, zucchini and tomato combo, carrots in a glaze, and numerous varieties of jams and jellies.

Canning Is This Young Mother's Hobby

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EAST PETERSBURG (Lancaster Co.) — Anyone who thinks canning food is a dying skill should meet Lynette Steager.

Wife of Todd Steager and mother of Jarrod, 2, and Meghan, 1, Lynette finds time for her favorite hobby — canning food.

"I'd rather can than bake or cook," Lynette said.

Her basement shelves are proof of her labors. Hundreds of jars filled with seasonal fruits, vegetables, hunting bounty, and meats line the shelves.

Lynette even cans baby food.

"The food comes right out of my garden so I can control what's in it (baby food)," Lynette said of the incentive to process her own baby food.

Jars filled with turkey, chicken, beef, and venison enable her to prepare quick, nutritious meals for her family.

"Canned meat is so tender and one of the easiest things to can," Lynette said, which makes canning a particular advantage for processing venison and other game.

Lynette shrugs off any admiration that canning is a demanding process.

"Anyone can do it if they have proper equipment," she said. "It's so easy to do."

One of the most essential items is a pressure canner. People unfamiliar with pressure canners often voice concerns that it might blow up their house or cause some other havoc.

According to Lynette, such fears are completely groundless. Pressure canners are completely safe and easy to use when instructions are followed.

She has attended several canning classes conducted at the Lancaster Extension office. Nancy Wiker, family living agent, teaches the classes. Lynette credits the classes with giving her lots of information in helping overcome canning failures. Lynette confesses that in a middle of a canning session she often calls the extension office for some SOS help.

For example, she recently canned tomato juice in some half-gallon jars she bought at a

public sale. To her dismay, the jar lids did not seal. Wiker explained that half-gallon jars are no longer made because food usually spoils in that size jar. It is difficult to cook food to the proper temperature in that size jar, Wiker explained. According to food safety guidelines, the half-gallon size jars are recommended only for canning grape juice.

Although people have canned food with boiling water bath methods in past generations, Wiker said that the risk of botulism is more prevalent today. Produce is often purchased elsewhere rather than homegrown. In years past, people often got sick with food-borne illnesses but it was passed off as the flu.

"I say that pressure canners are like a car seat belt. Most of the time you don't need it, but you use it as a precaution in case you do," Wiker said.

Food that appears questionable should not be even tasted. "Botulism is deadly. When in doubt, throw it out," Wiker said.

A common mistake for beginner canners results in screwing bands on too tightly. This causes the lids to buckle.

Have pressure canner dials checked yearly. Lynette was surprised that her pressure canner dial was so off balance

that she had been over-processing and exhaust the air 10 minutes.

Place the weight on the canner and bring it to the pressure desired. Wiker recommends a "dry run" before each canning episode with a pressure canner. This entails filling the canner with water, covering it with a lid but without the pressure weight in place. Bring the water to a boil

and exhaust the air 10 minutes. Place the weight on the canner and bring it to the pressure desired.

"This removes the air from the canner and prevents liquid from leaking out of the jars," Wiker said. (Turn to Page B12)



Nancy Wiker, family living and consumer science agent, directs Lynette in proper canning procedures that prevent food-borne illnesses. Pressure canner gauges, Wiker said, need to be tested annually to assure temperature control.

