



Canning Foods At Home – The Basics

Cooperative Extension
The University of Georgia



STONE SOUP KITCHEN

Basics of Safe Home Canning

- High quality food is selected and prepared according to specific directions following a USDA tested recommendation.
- Food is placed in a canning or MASON-type jar with a 2-piece lid and is heated to a temperature that destroys microorganisms.
- Heat also inactivates enzymes that can cause changes in color, flavor and texture.
- Air is driven from the jar during heating. As the jar cools, a vacuum seal is formed.





Vacuum Seal

- Holds the lid on the jar.
- Prevents recontamination of the food.
- Prevents air from drying out the food.



Canning Method

The canning method that is approved for a food depends on the type of food.

Foods are divided into two main categories:

- * those that contain acid (called “acid foods”)
- * those that have very little or no acid (called “low acid” foods)

Acid Foods

pH \approx 4.6 (measure of acidity)

- Generally all fruits
- Tomatoes and figs are borderline – (specific amounts of citric acid or lemon juice must be added before canning to acidify)
- Sauerkraut
- Foods to which large amounts of acid are added (pickles)



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Low Acid Foods

pH > 4.6

- **Generally all vegetables**
- **Meats**
- **Poultry**
- **Seafood**
- **Soups**
- **Mixtures of acid and low acid foods (spaghetti sauce – meat, vegetables and tomatoes)**





Two Approved Methods of Canning Foods At Home

1) Boiling Water Canning (212°F at sea level)

- Used for acid foods

2) Pressure Canning (at least 240°F)

- Used for low acid foods (and mixtures of acid and low acid foods)



Why Do Low Acid Foods Have to be Pressure Canned to be Safe?

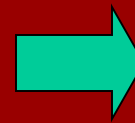
Clostridium botulinum!

- C. botulinum forms protective, heat-resistant spores.
- Spores require higher temperatures for destruction in a reasonable period of time (usually 240°F or above at sea level)

What Can Happen If Low Acid Foods Are Not Pressure Canned?

When conditions become favorable:

40 – 140 degrees F
High moisture
No air in jar



Spores germinate and form toxin-producing cells



Botulism



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What Can Happen If Low Acid Foods Are Not Pressure Canned?

- * Food can contain toxin without showing signs.
- * Symptoms usually appear within 12 to 72 hours:
 - Digestive upset (in some cases)
 - Blurred, double vision
 - Difficulty swallowing, speaking and breathing
 - Death



Preventing Botulism

Home Canned Foods

- Spores won't germinate in acid environments.
- Spores are destroyed when heated long enough at a specific temperature.
- USDA recommends a canner temperature of at least 240°F at sea level for canning low acid foods.
- Pressure canner must be used for all low acid foods.



Important “Musts” for Canning

- Food must be properly prepared and processed the correct amount of time.
- Canner must be accurate and operated correctly.
- You may need to make altitude adjustments, depending on your altitude.
- Directions from a reputable source must be followed (USDA, Cooperative Extension, National Center for Home Food Preservation (www.homefoodpreservation.com), Ball Blue Book, *So Easy To Preserve*).
- Up-to-date methods and information should be used; beware of “granny’s method.”



How Canning Process Times Are Determined

- Foods are prepared by a specific procedure.
- The length of time it takes to adequately heat the coldest spot in the jar is determined.
- Size of the jar, size of the food, consistency of the canning liquid, etc. all have an effect on how heat penetrates through the product.



What Does This Mean???

- * **Follow directions exactly. The following slow heat penetration:**
 - Adding extra sugar or fat.
 - Having food pieces larger than called for in directions.
 - Adding thickeners.
- * **Note: Heat-up and cool-down in pressure canners is counted toward heat penetration so don't quick-cool the canner!**



Methods of Pack

Raw Pack

- For foods that lose shape when cooked.
- Place raw food directly in jars. Boiling hot liquid is then poured over the food.
- Pack firmly, don't crush.
- Add jars carefully to canner.



Hot Pack

- Preferred method for most foods.
- Food is cooked in liquid before packing. Cooking liquid poured over food in jar.
- Fewer jars needed.
- Less floating.
- Better color and flavor.
- Easier to pack, foods pliable.

If directions only list hot pack instructions, then hot pack!

Headspace

- * Space in the jar between the inside of the lid and the top of the food or its liquid. Check directions for the correct headspace.
- * Usually:
 - 1/4" jellied fruit products
 - 1/2" fruits, tomatoes and pickles
 - 1" to 1-1/4" low acid foods



Headspace

* Too little

- Food may bubble out during processing.
- Deposit on rim may prevent proper sealing.

* Too much

- Food at the top is likely to discolor.
- Jar may not seal properly, because not all air may be forced from jar during process.





Jars and Lids

- * Wash canning jars; don't use if nicked or scratched – keep hot until used.
- * Prepare 2-piece canning lids and ring bands by package instructions.
- * Remove air bubbles (plastic knife).
- * Wipe jar rims with wet, clean cloth.
- * Adjust two-piece lids; tighten fingertip-tight.



Processing Time

- * Each food has its own processing time.

Follow directions carefully!

- * Time differs with size of jar.
- * Too Little
 - Spoilage

Boiling Water Canning Procedures



- * Have about 6" of water simmering or hot in canner.
 - Hot packed jars - simmering water
 - Raw packed jars - hot water
- * Place jars on rack in canner.
- * Water must be over the tops of the jars by at least one to two inches.



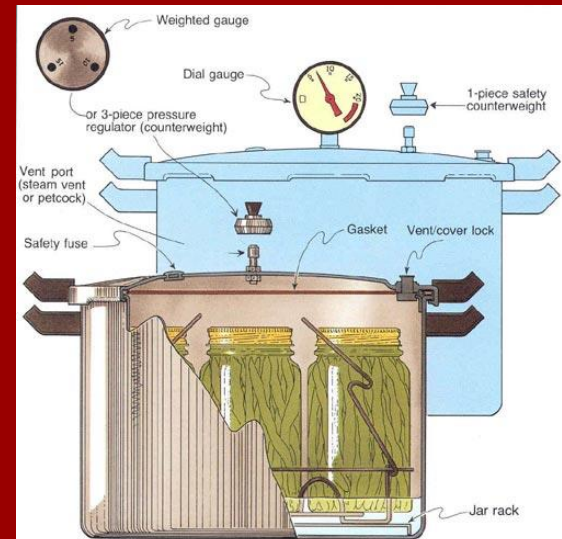
Boiling Water Canning Procedures Continued...

- * Add more hot or boiling water if necessary.
- * Begin timing the process when a full boil is reached.
- * Adjust for altitude if over 1000 ft.
- * After processing time is complete, turn off canner, remove lid and wait 5 minutes before removing jars.
- * Remove jars straight up out of canner and place on padded surface away from drafts.
- * Cool 12 to 24 hours, undisturbed.
- * Check seals.
- * Remove rings.
- * Wipe off jars before storing in a cool, dry, dark place.



Pressure Canning Procedures

- * Have 2" to 3" of water simmering or hot in canner.
 - Hot packed jars - simmering water
 - Raw packed jars - hot water
- * Place jars on rack in canner.
- * Put lid on canner with weight off or petcock open.



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Pressure Canning Procedures – continued...

- * Exhaust 10 minutes – steady stream of steam escaping.
- * Close vent or petcock.
- * Count time when correct pressure is reached.
- * Adjust for altitude, if needed.
- * Turn off heat at end of processing.
- * Let pressure drop to 0.

Pressure Canning Procedures – continued...

- **Wait about 2 minutes after pressure drops to 0 psig to make sure no pressure remains.**
(For some canners, check that locks in handles are released.)
- **Remove weight or open petcock. Wait 10 min.**
- **Open canner. (Be careful of steam!)**
- **Remove jars to padded surface or rack.**
- **Cool jars 12 to 24 hours, undisturbed.**
- **Check that jars have sealed.**





Testing for Seals

- * Listen for “pop”.
- * Lid curved inward, won’t move when pressed.
- * Clear ringing sound when tapped.

Storing Home Canned Food

- Store in a cool, dry, dark place.
- Avoid temperature extremes.
- Use within 1 year for best quality.





Disclaimer and Credit

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