

Getting Ready for Canning



With the increased number of home gardens, more people are interested in freezing or canning surplus fruits and vegetables.

Freezing is one of the simplest and best ways to “put up” most fruits and vegetables. Canning can be an economical way to preserve food at home and provides safe, nutritious food if the products are selected and processed properly. Canning may be a less expensive way of storing food than freezing, if you already have the equipment, but usually requires more time for correct and safe processing.

Steps for Safe Home Canning

For safe and successful home canning use the proper equipment and only recommended, tested methods, such as LSU AgCenter and USDA publications. Don't take shortcuts or experiment.

1. Determine the method of canning and equipment needed.

a. **Boiling-water canners** (also often called boiling water-bath canners or water-bath canners) are used for foods high in natural acids: fruits, most tomatoes,* pickles and relishes, jams and preserves.

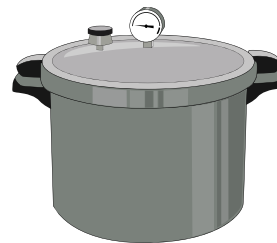


Boiling-water canners are made of aluminum or porcelain-covered steel. They have removable perforated racks and fitted lids. The boiling-water canner may be purchased, or it may be

improvised from a large metal container or bucket with a tightly fitting cover and a rack to keep the jars from touching the bottom. The container must be deep enough so the water can cover the jars by 1 or more inches and still have ample room for boiling (2 to 4 inches above jar tops).

**Note: Although tomatoes usually are considered an acid food, some are now known to have pH values slightly above 4.6. Figs also have pH values slightly above 4.6. Therefore, if they are to be canned as acid foods, these products must be acidified to a pH of 4.6 or lower with lemon juice or citric acid. Properly acidified tomatoes and figs are acid foods and can be safely processed in a boiling-water canner.*

b.) **Pressure canners** are the only safe method of processing all other common vegetables, meat, fish and poultry. They reach an interior temperature of 240 degrees, which is much higher than the 212-degree temperature of boiling water. They reach this temperature when pressure builds up to 10.5 pounds at 0 to 1,000 feet of altitude. This higher temperature kills microorganisms when applied for a sufficient period of time. Pressure itself does not destroy the microorganisms, but it is necessary to produce the high temperature that kills the botulism-causing bacterium, botulinum.



The pounds of pressure number was rounded to 11 pounds in dial-gauge canners to avoid the confusion of half-pound recommendations.

Weighted-gauge canners are already machined to operate at 10.5 pounds as a built-in safety factor when they are set at 10 pounds. To reach the temperature required to kill microorganisms, it's imperative to follow manufacturer's instructions precisely and to use reliable sources for processing times.

Pressure canners come in styles deep enough for one layer of quart-size or smaller jars or deep enough for two layers of pint-size or smaller jars. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that a canner be large enough to hold at least four 1-quart jars to be considered a pressure canner for its published processes.

2. Use only high-quality produce. Fruits and vegetables that are not mature enough lack flavor. On the other hand, overripe fruits and tomatoes may lack enough natural acid to be safe when canned in the water bath canner.

3. For best results, use only jars and jar lids made especially for home canning. Most commercial (one-trip) pint- and quart-size mayonnaise jars can be used to can acid foods in a boiling-water canner, but they break easily and may not seal. Don't use commercial jars in pressure canners – excessive breakage is a problem. Commercial jars with mouths that cannot

be sealed with two-piece canning lids are not recommended for use in canning any food at home. Before using the canning jars, check them closely for signs of cracks or chips.

If jars will be processed in a boiling water bath for less than 10 minutes, sterilize them by placing them in boiling water for 10 minutes before filling them. After the jars are sterilized, keep them hot by leaving them in the hot water until it's time to fill them. Jars processed in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes or more, or in a pressure canner, will be sterilized during processing and do not need prior sterilization. They do need to be washed in hot, soapy water, rinsed and kept hot until filled and placed in the canner.

Follow the recommended procedures for filling the jars. To remove any trapped air bubbles, slide a non-metallic spatula or scraper between the food and the sides of the jar. Add more liquid if necessary to obtain the proper headspace. Wipe the jar rim with a clean, damp cloth to remove any food particles.

4. Use sealing lids only once, but reuse the screw bands as long as they are in good condition. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for treating the lids. Some need to be covered with hot water, and others need to be boiled for a minute or more.

5. Other equipment needed include a wire rack to hold the jars off the bottom of the pan, tongs with a large enough opening for the jar lids, oven mitts, cooling racks and a timer.

6. Follow the time and temperature recommendations for specific foods as listed in the instructions.

7. After processing the foods, wait 12 to 24 hours to test for a good seal. Press the center of the lid. If the dome is down and doesn't spring back, the jar is sealed. Remove the rings, and wash, dry and store them for reuse. Store home-canned foods in a cool, dry place.

8. Never use canned foods that show signs of spoilage. For added safety, boil all home-canned, low-acid foods for at least 10 minute before tasting.

9. Consider taking a self-study course, Preserving Food at Home: A Self-Study, offered for free by the National Center for Home Food Preservation. The course consists of four lessons: Introduction to Food Preservation, General Canning, Canning Acid Foods and Canning Low-Acid Foods. You can register for the course on the center's Web site, <http://www.home-foodpreservation.com>.

10. Contact your parish LSU AgCenter office for additional information.

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