

K-State Research and Extension News

10 Tips for Safe Home Canning

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We are entering the season for home canning! Canning is a great way to enjoy produce year around, save money (excluding your labor), preserve food at its peak, and provide great homemade taste. But there are many dos and don'ts when it comes to canning. Just as the science of medicine continues to improve, so does the science of canning. Would you want to see a doctor that uses 50-year-old medical practices? Probably not. In a similar way, why not take advantage of the scientific advances in safe food preservation? It is important for you and your loved ones who are eating the finished product to become familiar with the newest recommendations!

1. Use Current, Tested Recipes. Because the science on canning safety has evolved and advanced greatly, we recommend using recipes from 1994 or newer. Older recipes may be unsafe. Some good resources include: USDA's Complete Guide to Home Canning, Ball Blue Book (2005 or newer), Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving, So Easy to Preserve Fifth Edition or newer (University of Georgia), and current K-State Research and Extension Publications available at your local Extension Office.

Recommended websites include: National Center for Home Food Preservation:

<http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>, Jarden Home Brands: Ball Fresh Preserving:

<http://www.homecanning.com/>, K-State Research and Extension: <http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/canning.html>

2. Do not Make Up Your Own Canning Recipes! Do not add thickeners, oil or low acid vegetables like peppers, garlic or onions to any tested recipe. Do not change the amounts of ingredients. Feel free to make these exceptions to the rule: 1) Change the salt level in anything EXCEPT pickles and sauerkraut. 2) Change the sugar level in syrups used for canned fruits EXCEPT in traditional southern preserves (when very thick sugar syrup is needed for preservation). 3) Add extra vinegar or lemon juice beyond what a recipe calls for. 4) Substitute bell peppers, long green peppers, or jalapeno peppers for each other in salsas if the TOTAL amount of peppers in the tested recipe is NOT increased or decreased. 5) Amounts of herbs and spices can be changed if they are dried, NOT fresh.

3. If you're in doubt about the safety of a recipe - - FREEZE it! If you make up your own recipe, or change a tested one in ANY way, freezing is a safe alternative to preserve foods. Or follow a tested recipe and adjust it right before you serve the food.

4. Tomatoes need added acid as a margin of safety - this includes salsas! For salsas - follow a tested recipe exactly! For tomatoes, add 1 tablespoon commercially prepared lemon juice to each pint or 2 tablespoons per quart. This will affect flavor, so sugar may be added to mask the tartness. Or, add ¼ teaspoon CITRIC (NOT ascorbic) acid per pint or ½ teaspoon per quart.

5. Don't use over-ripe, bruised, frozen or low-quality produce when canning. Preservation doesn't improve the quality of any food. It's a waste of time and energy to try to "hide" inferior quality produce in preserved foods. Also, the microbe level could be higher than normal so processing will not kill all the bacteria that can cause spoilage. In time, jars may spoil in storage.

6. Adjust Processing Times and Pressure Used For YOUR Elevation! This could be the most common mistake home canners make. For boiling water canning, add processing time for any tested recipe, depending on your altitude. Canner pressure needs to be adjusted for your specific elevation. You can easily look up your elevation on the internet or ask for the elevation publication at your local extension office.

7. Have your pressure canner dial gauge tested often to help ensure the safety of your home canned foods. Annually is recommended. However, if the lid is bumped or the needle is jumping, have it tested again. Contact your local extension office to learn details about testing.

8. Choose and use the proper equipment for the job. All food must be processed either in a pressure canner or a boiling water canner following a tested recipe. Pressure canners are used for low acid foods. Boiling water canners are used for high acid foods. Contact your local extension office for more information on low and high acid foods. A pressure saucepan is NOT a substitute for a pressure canner. Use regulation canning jars and new lids (flats).

9. Processing Time: If your processing time is interrupted, or the pressure dips below the required level, re-start the processing time from zero and continue for the full recommended time.

10. Storing Your Preserved Food: Try not to move the jars until they have completely cooled. Make sure the jar has sealed, remove rings, label jars with the recipe used and date canned. Monitor your jars for any bubbling or abnormal smells. Remember, a sealed jar is not necessarily a safe jar!

Sources: University of Idaho Extension, Important Canning Do's and Don'ts. K-state Research and Extension, Rapid Response Center <http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/canning.html>. For more information on nutrition, food safety, health, or family and child development contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829) offices, or write to fmeastwo@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescygn.es.k-state.edu