



A Home Canning Refresher

The right equipment and an up-to-date recipe developed for canning ensures safety and success this canning season.

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You must understand canners and the foods that belong in each to assure food safety.
JIM BLACK PHOTO

When processing food at home, there are safe and unsafe methods. Safety begins with understanding canners, and the foods that belong in each type of canner.

The boiling water canner can be safely used for high acid foods. High acid foods include fruits, tomatoes, pickles, and fruit spreads. Tomatoes and pickles must be properly acidified, and some fruits require acidification as well.

Pressure canning is necessary for low acid foods. Low acid foods include vegetables, meats, fish, poultry, or any food containing these ingredients. Some tomato products require pressure canning as well.

You may come across other suggestions for sealing a jar, none of which are safe. Among the methods you might hear about include open kettle canning, oven canning, using a solar box canner, or even sealing with an iron.



The most recent entry into the new canning equipment discussion is using the electric multi-purpose pressure cooker as a canner. No processing times have been determined for these devices and they are not safe for home canning.

In addition to the proper equipment, the recipe or instructions you follow must meet current safety standards. One of the greatest misconceptions of home canning is that a sealed jar is a safe jar. This is not true. The proper heat treatment of the food inside the jar is what makes it safe, the seal simply keeps it safe. A processing time developed specifically for the food or recipe in the jar is the critical safety step. If there is not processing time published, freeze the food instead.

A second misconception is that you can determine safety of a food by its appearance. People believe if the food looks fine, it's safe. Another untrue statement. The organisms that cause illness (called pathogens) cannot be detected by looking. You don't see them, smell them, or taste them.

Finally, past success is not an assurance of safety. We often hear people say they've done it for years and never had any problems. Pathogenic organisms are everywhere in the environment, but they are also randomly dispersed in the environment. Not having problems with an untested recipe in the past may have been simply luck, as the pathogenic organisms were not present. Unfortunately, luck can run out at any time, and any improperly canned food can lead to illness or death.

Before you begin your canning season, follow these general safety tips.

Locate a recipe developed and tested for canning. Contact the WSU Extension office for guidance. Research based recipes are available from the **National Center for Home Food Preservation**

www.homefoodpreservation.com or on the WSU Benton

county website <https://extension.wsu.edu/benton-franklin/health/homefoodpreservation/publications>.

Make sure you have the right equipment and you can complete the process from beginning to end without interruption.

For canning the essential pieces of equipment include a canner with rack, canning jars and two-piece canning lids.

There is nothing magical about a boiling water canner. Any large pot will do. You will need a rack for the bottom, to keep jars for direct contact with heat and prevent breakage. The pot will need to be tall enough to cover jars with water by 1-2 inches, with room for water to boil. Pressure canners are more complex and require a canner designed to accomplish the task.

Canning jars are tempered to withstand the heat, and harsh conditions in the canner. Other jars may break, resulting in food loss.

Two-piece canning lids are the standard for sealing jars. Flat metal lids are single use, and should not be reused. It is no longer necessary to pre-heat lids before use, simply wash in hot soapy water and rinse. Last year, canning lids were hard to find. This year they are beginning to make their appearances on grocery store shelves and the manufacturers have assured us there will not be a shortage this year.

Finally avoid instructions in old canning publications; cookbooks, or gardening books. Also, be cautious of personal recipes, or recipes on Internet sites. If something from one of these places looks interesting, check the information first, by comparing against current standards. Fortunately in our region, WSU Master Food Preserver volunteers are available to help with this process.

Contact the Master Food Preservers through the Yakima Extension Office at (509) 574-1600, or Benton County Extension office at (509)735-3551, or email powers@wsu.edu. Be safe, not sorry this canning season!



Master Gardeners Plant Clinic

The public is encouraged to contact our diagnostic clinic by telephone, email, or in person at the Downtown Yakima Farmer's Market each Sunday morning through the end of October. For better identification, you are encouraged to bring a sample of the damaged plant in a sealed Zip Lock bag.

Telephone: 509-574-1604

Email: gardener@co.yakima.wa.us

Because of Covid-19 precautions, our office is closed for personal visits until further notice.