

#48

SAFE CANNING PRACTICES

Clover Safe notes are intended primarily for 4-H volunteers and members nine years and older.



Photograph Courtesy of the University of California 4-H Archives

A successful canning operation involves: (1) using heat to thoroughly destroy microorganisms that naturally occur in foods and on food container surfaces and (2) preventing reintroduction of microorganisms by completely sealing the sterilized food and container interior/lid bottom from the atmosphere. Implementing careful and thorough food preparation and processing techniques produces a safe and successful canning operation that will result in healthy and tasty food products for the consumers' enjoyment.

Safe Canning Practices

- Before starting, inspect the pressure cooker to assure the gauge is operating properly, gaskets and seals are intact, and the cooker lid engages properly when closed.
- Inspect all canning jars to assure they have been thoroughly washed and rinsed and there are no rim nicks or cracks. Do not use any jars that do not pass your inspection.
- Inspect all lids and screw bands to assure they are new, clean, and free of rust. Do not use any lids and screw bands that do not pass your inspection.
- Use the pressure cooker canning method for low acid foods such as vegetables (except for tomatoes), meats, seafood, and mixes of food that incorporate some low acid foods.
- Use the boiling bath canning method for acid foods such as fruits, tomatoes, pickles, relish, sauerkraut, and other foods where vinegar has been added.
- For best flavor and nutrition results, foods should be canned within 12 hours of harvest.
- Choose high quality foods for canning that are free of diseases, defects, bruises, and discoloration.
- Always wash food before peeling, slicing, cutting, and/or beginning the canning process.
- Carefully follow instructions for heating (or sterilizing) jars, lids, and screw bands. Likewise, carefully follow recipes for cooking the food before starting the canning process.
- Use a canning rack to hold jars when inside, jar-lifting tongs to remove heated jars from, and a lid wand to remove heated lids from the boiling water-bath container during the sterilization step.
- Leave the recommended recipe headspace between the bottom of the lid and top of the food when filling canning jars. Clean the jar rim with a dampened paper towel. Fit the screw band over the lid and tighten according to the manufacturer's directions.
- When using a boiling bath for canning, follow the recommended time for jars to undergo boiling.
- When using a pressure cooker for canning, carefully heat cooker to maintain correct pressure. When finished, allow the cooker to cool to the touch and thereafter, completely depressurize the cooker by uncovering the vent port or opening the petcock. Lift the lid away from your face to avoid steam burns.
- At the completion of canning, remove jars of food from the canner with lifting tongs and place on a towel or cooling rack. Do not move jars until thoroughly cooled.
- If you are injured while canning, notify your project leader, parent, or guardian. Seek medical attention if the injury is serious.
- When finished, clean the canning work area and put cleaned kitchen cookware and utensils away.
- Store canned food jars for no longer than one year. Label the jars so you can identify the contents and the date they were canned.

Portions of the information given herein are modified from the document "Complete Guide to Home Canning," Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539 USDA (revised 1994). Also available online at <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/general.html>.