

Home Canning Safety Tips

Canning food at home can be a great way to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables that you either grew yourself or purchased from local farmers. However, if you don't do it the correct way, you can cause serious illnesses and even death from foodborne illnesses. Make sure the foods that you prepare at home are safe for you and your family by following these recommendations that come from the National Center for Home Food Preservation.

1. **Make sure that your canning equipment is clean and works properly.** If you are using a pressure canner with a dial gage make sure it is accurate. They can be tested and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service can test them. Check the gaskets; make sure it is in good shape. Check the vents, safety valves and edges of the lid and make sure they are clean
2. **Have a clean area to prepare the food.** Make sure that your kitchen is clean and sanitized and clutter free.
3. **Make sure you have the freshest food possible.** Avoid using produce that has a lot of blemishes and is not very fresh.
4. **Always use a pressure canner for canning low-acid foods.** This includes most vegetables, except for tomato products; seafood, poultry and meat..
5. **Check your jars and lids.** Check for nicks and cracks. Use only Mason jars that are approved for safe canning. New lids are a must when canning. Rings should be replaced if they are rusted or have dents.
6. **Always use tested recipes that have up-to-date, research processing times.** The National Center for Home Food Preservation, Ball Canning, and other companies that makes home canning supplies are good resources. Current Extension publications are also good resources. Recipes from cookbooks, the personal internet sites and older Extension publications should not be used.
7. **Do not alter ingredients in tested recipes.** Changing the ingredients in a tested recipe can make that recipe unsafe for home food preservation.
8. **When filling jars,** always use the correct headspace. Headspace is the space in the jar that is between the lid and the top of the food or liquid. Having too little or too much headspace can affect how the lid seals and the quality of the final product.
9. **After jars have been process, check the lids within 12 to 24 hours to make sure they are sealed.** Food from jars that did not seal should be frozen or refrigerated and eaten in a couple of days. You may also reprocess or re-can it within 24 hours.
10. **Label lids with the name of the food, date the food was canned and batch number (if you canned more than once that day).** That way if you see signs of spoilage, you can identify the batch number and pay special attention to those jars.
11. **Store canned foods in a dark, cool and dry place.** If the food is stored in a humid place, the moisture can cause the lids to rust, leading to spoilage. Periodically check the jars for signs of spoilage.
12. **For best quality, use home canned foods within one year.**

The Parker County Extension office will offer two food preservations workshops in June. They will take place on June 16, and June 30, 2017. These are classes that include hands on training to safely preserve food. For complete details and to register for the classes call 817-598-6168 or visit the Extension website at www.parker.agrilife.org.