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Complete Guide to Home Canning

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Acknowledgments

The creation of an Extension Service Center for Excellence at the Penn State University in the 1980s made it possible to conduct the research necessary to revise four previously published bulletins for canning foods in the home. The Center was the cooperative effort of the Extension Service, Cooperative State Research Service, and the Penn State University with Gerald D. Kuhn, PhD, of the Penn State University as Director. A National Center for Home Food Processing and Preservation was established in 2000 as a cooperative effort of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service) and the University of Georgia as the lead institution in a multi-state activity with Elizabeth L. Andress, PhD, as Project Director. This Center conducted research that made it possible to include some new products in this revised guide.

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Complete Guide to Home Canning

Caution: All home-canned foods should be canned according to the procedures in this Guide. Low-acid and tomato foods not canned according to the recommendations in this publication or according to other USDA-endorsed recommendations present a risk of botulism. If it is possible that any deviation from the USDA-endorsed methods occurred, to prevent the risk of botulism, low-acid and tomato foods should be boiled in a saucepan before consuming even if you detect no signs of spoilage. At altitudes below 1,000 ft, boil foods for 10 minutes. Add an additional minute of boiling time for each additional 1,000 ft elevation. However, this is not intended to serve as a recommendation for consuming foods known to be significantly underprocessed according to current standards and recommended methods. It is not a guarantee that all possible defects and hazards with non-recommended methods can be overcome by this boiling process. The recommendation is to only can low-acid and tomato foods according to the procedures in this Guide.

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Preface

Home canning has changed greatly in the 180 years since it was introduced as a way to preserve food. Scientists have found ways to produce safer, higher quality products. The first part of this publication explains the scientific principles on which canning techniques are based, discusses canning equipment, and describes the proper use of jars and lids. It describes basic canning ingredients and procedures and how to use them to achieve safe, high-quality canned products. Finally, it helps you decide whether or not and how much to can.

The second part of this publication is a series of canning guides for specific foods. These guides offer detailed directions for making sugar syrups; and for canning fruits and fruit products, tomatoes and tomato products, vegetables, red meats, poultry, seafoods, and pickles and relishes. Handy guidelines for choosing the right quantities and quality of raw foods accompany each set of directions for fruits, tomatoes, and vegetables. Most recipes are designed to yield a full canner load of pints or quarts. Finally, processing adjustments for altitudes above sea level are given for each food.

This publication contains many new research-based recommendations for canning safer and better quality food at home. It is an invaluable resource book for persons who are canning food for the first time. Experienced canners will find updated information to help them improve their canning practices.

Research is continually being conducted in areas that affect food preservation recommendations. Make sure your food preservation information is always current with up-to-date tested guidelines.

This publication supersedes four USDA Home and Garden Bulletins: Number 8—"Home Canning of Fruits and Vegetables"; Number 56—"How to Make Jellies, Jams, and Preserves at Home"; Number 92—"Making Pickles and Relishes at Home"; and Number 106—"Home Canning of Meat and Poultry."

For Safety's Sake

Pressure canning is the only recommended method for canning meat, poultry, seafood, and vegetables. The bacterium *Clostridium botulinum* is destroyed in low-acid foods when they are processed at the correct time and pressure in pressure canners. Using boiling water canners for these foods poses a real risk of botulism poisoning.

If *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria survive and grow inside a sealed jar of food, they can produce a poisonous toxin. Even a taste of food containing this toxin can be fatal. Boiling food 10 minutes at altitudes below 1,000 ft should destroy this poison when it is present. For altitudes at and above 1,000 ft, add 1 additional minute per 1,000 ft additional elevation.

Caution: To prevent the risk of botulism, low-acid and tomato foods not canned according to the recommendations in this publication or according to other USDA-endorsed recommendations should be boiled as above, in a saucepan before consuming, even if you detect no signs of spoilage. This is not intended to serve as a recommendation for consuming foods known to be significantly underprocessed according to current standards and recommended methods. It is not a guarantee that all possible defects and hazards with other methods can be overcome by this boiling process. All low-acid foods canned according to the approved recommendations may be eaten without boiling them when you are sure of all the following:

- Food was processed in a pressure canner.
- Gauge of the pressure canner was accurate.
- Up-to-date researched process times and pressures were used for the size of jar, style of pack, and kind of food being canned.
- The process time and pressure recommended for sterilizing the food at your altitude was followed.
- Jar lid is firmly sealed and concave.
- Nothing has leaked from jar.
- No liquid spurts out when jar is opened.
- No unnatural or “off” odors can be detected.

Do Your Canned Foods Pass This Test?

Overall appearance

- Good proportion of solid to liquid
- Full pack with proper headspace
- Liquid just covering solid
- Free of air bubbles
- Free of imperfections—stems, cores, seeds
- Good seals
- Practical pack that is done quickly and easily

Fruit and vegetables

- Pieces uniform in size and shape
- Characteristic, uniform color
- Shape retained—not broken or mushy
- Proper maturity

Liquid or syrup

- Clear and free from sediment

Determining Your Altitude Above Sea Level

It is important to know your approximate elevation or altitude above sea level in order to determine a safe processing time for canned foods. Since the boiling temperature of liquid is lower at higher elevations, it is critical that additional time be given for the safe processing of foods at altitudes above sea level.

It is not practical to include a list of altitudes in this guide, since there is wide variation within a State and even a county. For example, the State of Kansas has areas with altitudes varying between 75 ft to 4,039 ft above sea level. Kansas is not generally thought to have high altitudes, but there are many areas of the State where adjustments for altitude must be considered. Colorado, on the other hand, has people living in areas between 3,000 and 10,000 ft above sea level. They tend to be more conscious of the need to make altitude adjustments in the various processing schedules. To list altitudes for specific counties may actually be misleading, due to the differences in geographic terrain within a county.

If you are unsure about the altitude where you will be canning foods, consult your county Extension agent. An alternative source of information would be your local district conservationist with the Soil Conservation Service.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Acknowledgments	not numbered
Preface.....	ii
For Safety’s Sake.....	iii
Do Your Canned Foods Pass This Test?	iii
Determining Your Altitude Above Sea Level	iv
Guide 1. Principles of Home Canning	1-3
Why can foods?	1-5
How canning preserves foods	1-5
Ensuring safe canned foods	1-6
Ensuring high-quality canned foods	1-11
Jars and lids	1-13
Recommended canners	1-17
Selecting the correct processing time	1-22
Cooling jars	1-25
Testing jar seals	1-25
Reprocessing unsealed jars	1-26
Storing canned food	1-26
Identifying and handling spoiled canned food	1-26
Preparing pickled and fermented foods	1-27
Preparing butters, jams, jellies, and marmalades	1-29
Canned foods for special diets	1-31
Canning fruit-based baby foods	1-31
How much should you can?	1-32
Glossary of Terms	1-33
Index of Foods	1-36
Guide 2. Selecting, Preparing, and Canning Fruit and Fruit Products	2-3
General	2-5
Preparing and using syrups	2-5
Apple butter	2-6
Apple juice	2-6
Apples—sliced	2-7
Applesauce	2-7
Spiced apple rings	2-8
Spiced crab apples	2-9
Apricots—halved or sliced	2-9
Berries—whole	2-10
Berry syrup	2-10
Cantaloupe pickles	2-11
Cantaloupe pickles, no sugar added	2-12
Cherries—whole	2-12

Cranberry orange chutney	2-13
Figs	2-14
Fruit purees	2-14
Grapefruit and orange sections	2-15
Grape juice	2-15
Grapes—whole	2-16
Mango chutney	2-16
Mango sauce	2-17
Mixed fruit cocktail	2-18
Nectarines—halved or sliced	2-18
Peaches—halved or sliced	2-19
Pears—halved	2-19
Pears, Asian—halved or sliced	2-20
Pineapple	2-21
Plums—halved or whole	2-21
Rhubarb—stewed	2-22
Zucchini-pineapple	2-22
Fruit salsas	2-23
Spicy cranberry salsa	2-23
Mango salsa	2-24
Peach salsa	2-24
Peach apple salsa	2-25
Pie fillings	2-25
Apple pie filling	2-26
Blueberry pie filling	2-27
Cherry pie filling	2-27
Festive mincemeat	2-28
Green tomato pie filling	2-29
Peach pie filling	2-30
Process times for some acid foods in a dial-gauge pressure canner	2-31
Process times for some acid foods in a weighted-gauge pressure canner	2-32

Guide 3. Selecting, Preparing, and Canning Tomatoes and Tomato Products.3-3

General	3-5
Tomato juice	3-5
Tomato and vegetable juice blend	3-6
Tomatoes—crushed	3-7
Standard tomato sauce	3-8
Tomatoes—whole or halved (packed in water)	3-9
Tomatoes—whole or halved (packed in tomato juice)	3-10
Tomatoes—whole or halved (packed raw without added liquid)	3-11
Tomatoes with okra or zucchini	3-12
Tomatillos	3-13
Spaghetti sauce without meat	3-13
Spaghetti sauce with meat	3-14
Mexican tomato sauce	3-15
Easy hot sauce	3-16
Cayenne pepper sauce	3-17

Tomato ketchup	3-17
Country western ketchup	3-18
Blender ketchup	3-18
Salsa recipes	3-19
Selection and preparation of ingredients	3-19
Chile salsa (hot tomato-pepper sauce)	3-21
Chile salsa II	3-22
Tomatillo green salsa	3-22
Tomato salsa using paste tomatoes	3-23
Tomato salsa using slicing tomatoes	3-24
Tomato/green chile salsa	3-24
Tomato/tomato paste salsa	3-25
Tomato taco sauce	3-26

Guide 4.

Selecting, Preparing, and Canning Vegetables and Vegetable Products 4-3

Asparagus—spears or pieces	4-5
Beans or peas—shelled, dried	4-5
Beans, baked	4-6
Beans, dry, with tomato or molasses sauce	4-6
Beans, fresh lima—shelled	4-7
Beans, snap and Italian—pieces	4-8
Beets—whole, cubed, or sliced	4-9
Carrots—sliced or diced	4-10
Corn—cream style	4-10
Corn—whole kernel	4-11
Mixed vegetables	4-12
Mushrooms—whole or sliced	4-13
Okra	4-14
Peas, green or English—shelled	4-14
Peppers	4-15
Potatoes, sweet—pieces or whole	4-16
Potatoes, white—cubed or whole	4-17
Pumpkins and winter squash—cubed	4-18
Soups	4-18
Spinach and other greens	4-19
Squash, winter—cubed	4-20
Succotash	4-20

Guide 5. Preparing and Canning Poultry, Red Meats, and Seafoods.....5-3

Chicken or rabbit	5-5
Ground or chopped meat	5-6
Strips, cubes, or chunks of meat	5-6
Meat stock (broth)	5-7
Chile con carne	5-8
Clams	5-9
King and Dungeness crab meat	5-9
Fish in pint jars	5-10

Fish in quart jars	5-11
Oysters	5-12
Smoked fish	5-13
Tuna	5-14

Guide 6. Preparing and Canning Fermented Foods and Pickled Vegetables... 6-3

Selection of Fresh Cucumbers	6-5
Low-temperature pasteurization treatment	6-5
Suitable containers, covers, and weights for fermenting food	6-6
Salts used in pickling	6-7

Fermented foods 6-7

Dill pickles	6-7
Sauerkraut	6-8

Cucumber Pickles 6-9

Bread-and-butter pickles	6-9
Quick fresh-pack dill pickles	6-10
Sweet gherkin pickles	6-10
14-day sweet pickles	6-11
Quick sweet pickles	6-12

Other Vegetable Pickles 6-13

Pickled asparagus	6-13
Pickled dilled beans	6-14
Pickled three-bean salad	6-14
Pickled beets	6-15
Pickled carrots	6-16
Pickled baby carrots	6-16
Pickled cauliflower or Brussels sprouts	6-17
Chayote and jicama slaw	6-17
Bread-and-butter pickled jicama	6-18
Marinated whole mushrooms	6-18
Pickled dilled okra	6-19
Pickled pearl onions	6-20
Marinated peppers	6-20
Pickled bell peppers	6-21
Pickled hot peppers	6-22
Pickled jalapeño pepper rings	6-23
Pickled yellow pepper rings	6-24
Pickled sweet green tomatoes	6-24
Pickled mixed vegetables	6-25
Pickled bread-and-butter zucchini	6-26

Pickled Vegetable Relishes 6-26

Chayote and pear relish	6-26
Piccalilli	6-27
Pickle relish	6-28
Pickled corn relish	6-28
Pickled green tomato relish	6-29
Pickled horseradish sauce	6-30
Pickled pepper-onion relish	6-30

Spicy jicama relish	6-30
Tangy tomatillo relish	6-31
Pickled Foods for Special Diets	6-32
No sugar added pickled beets	6-32
No sugar added sweet pickle cucumber slices	6-33
Reduced-sodium sliced dill pickles	6-34
Reduced-sodium sliced sweet pickles	6-34
Guide 7. Preparing and Canning Jams and Jellies	7-3
Making jelly without added pectin	7-5
Extracting juices and making jelly	7-5
Making jam without added pectin	7-6
Making jams and jellies with added pectin	7-7
Pear-apple jam	7-8
Strawberry-rhubarb jelly	7-8
Blueberry-spice jam	7-9
Grape-plum jelly	7-10
Golden pepper jelly	7-10
Making reduced-sugar fruit spreads	7-11
Peach-pineapple spread	7-11
Refrigerated apple spread (made with gelatin)	7-12
Refrigerated grape spread (made with gelatin)	7-12
Remaking soft jellies	7-13