



Plan Now for Summer Canning

It's time to plan for home canning this summer! Proper equipment in good condition is required for safe, high quality home canned food. Start by checking your equipment and supplies.

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Canners

Check the *pressure canner*.

- Have the dial gauge tested for accuracy.
- The rubber gasket is flexible and soft, not brittle, sticky or cracked. If you need to replace the rubber gasket, know the brand and model number of the canner when you go to purchase one. There are

many styles of gaskets available, and you will not be able to judge the thickness and size of the rubber gasket by sight.

- The washer on the air vent is pliable.
- The pressure release plug is pliable and in good condition. Replacement plugs are often included in the gasket replacement packs.
- Vent ports are open. Hold the lid to the light to make sure any small pipes or vent ports with openings are clean and open all the way through. Small vents can be cleaned with a small brush or pipe cleaner.
- The lid fits securely and is not bent.
- The handles are secure, not broken, cracked, or missing.

Replacement parts for pressure canners may be found at some stores that sell pressure canners, from the manufacturer, or online. It may be difficult to find replacement parts for very old canners and for models that are no longer made.

Check the *boiling water canner*.

- Check the height of the canner. It needs to be deep enough to allow at least one to two inches of water to boil vigorously above the tops of the jars. Some of the new boiling water canners are designed for processing jams and jellies and are only deep enough for pint jars. If you plan to can in quart jars, look for a taller canner and measure the height of the canner so that there is space for a rack, the jars, at least one inch of water above the jars, and room for the water to boil rapidly without boiling over.
- Canner has a lid or lid alternative.
- The lid fits securely.

Check the *atmospheric steam canner*.

- Cover sits comfortably on base.
- Rack sits securely on base and does not rock.
- Vents hole(s) are open.
- Handles are secure.
- Check accuracy of built-in temperature indicator if model has one.

Note: The darkened surface on the inside of an aluminum canner can be cleaned by filling it above the darkened line with a mixture of 1 tablespoon cream of tartar to each quart of water. Place the canner on the stove, heat water to a boil, and boil covered until the dark deposits disappear. Empty the canner and wash it with hot soapy water, rinse and dry. Source: University of Georgia, *So Easy to Preserve*, 6th edition, c. 2014, page 22.

Jars

- Inventory your jars and decide if you need to buy new ones.
- Inspect jars for nicks, cracks, or chips, especially around the top sealing edge. Nicks can prevent lids from sealing. Very old jars weaken with age and repeated use and may break under pressure and heat. New jars are a better investment over time than buying used jars at yard sales or flea markets.

- Use mason jars that are specifically designed for home canning.
- Although canning jars come in a variety of sizes from half-cup to half-gallon jars, processing times have not been developed for many foods in half-pint, 12-ounce, or 24-ounce jars. If a recipe does not specify a processing time for one of these jars, process according to the time given for the next larger jar. Half-gallon canning jars are only suitable for very acid juices such as apple juice and grape juice.
- Remove excess scale (or hard water film) by soaking jars several hours in a solution containing 1 cup vinegar (5 % acidity) per gallon of water.
- Before every use, wash empty jars in hot water with detergent and rinse well by hand, or wash in a dishwasher. Unrinsed detergents may cause unnatural flavors and colors.

Lids

- Use two piece lids consisting of a flat metal disc which has a sealing compound around the outer edge and a separate metal screw band. This is the only type recommended by the USDA.
- Always use new flat lids. The screw bands are reusable if they are not bent, dented or rusted.
- Do not reuse lids from commercially canned foods for home canning.
- Examine all metal lids carefully. Do not use old, dented, or deformed lids, or lids with gaps or other defects in the sealing gasket.
- Buy only the quantity of lids you will use in a year

Helpful Tools

Other items helpful for home canning:

- A jar lifter is essential for easy removal of hot jars from the canner.
- A wide mouth funnel helps in packing small food items and jams into canning jars.
- A plastic bubble freer removes air bubbles from jars. Metal knives or objects should not be used as a bubble freer because they can scratch the glass making the jar more susceptible to breakage.
- A lid wand has a magnet on the end that helps remove lids from the hot water.
- A timer or clock is needed to determine the end of the processing time.
- Up-to-date canning instructions. The USDA canning guides were last updated in 2014. Major revisions were made about twenty years ago. Canning books published

prior to 1994 will not have safe processing times and/or methods. The [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#) offers canning information and research tested canning recipes. Penn State Extension has a series of [Let's Preserve](#) fact sheets for download or purchase. Another great resource is [So Easy to Preserve](#) from the University of Georgia.

Planning can save you time, money, and frustration. Make it a happy, successful canning season by getting prepared before your harvest is ready.