

Pressure Canning in El Dorado County? Yes!

by Chuck Haynes

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For those of us who like to preserve beautiful fruits and vegetables, there is no getting around the summer heat unless it is done in an air-conditioned kitchen or cool basement, or even an outbuilding. However, come cool or cold weather, preserving can still be done – things like soups, peas, meat, fish and other concoctions for easy and quick meals for later on in the year. Someone once said that “It’s not pressure canning season!” But we say, “It’s ALWAYS pressure canning season!” In fact, winter and early spring are the best times to do some of it. Sure, it takes a long time and it does get warm, but it will heat the house for you! That’s a bonus!

When I took the classes to become UC Master Food Preserver, I have to admit I was a bit shaky thinking about pressure canning. I mean, we have all seen those scary pictures on the internet and heard all the horror stories about grandma’s pressure canner blowing up, leaving potatoes and vegetables on the cabinets and ceiling! But what I found is that today’s pressure canners are actually really safe. They have special features that will not allow you to take the lid off until the pressure drops to a safe value. If for some reason your vent pipe becomes clogged and the pressure builds up too much, there is a safety valve that will pop out and vent steam, but will also lower the pressure within the canner. To be honest, pressure canners are really very safe! Yes, the first time you use one and see the weight start to wiggle and hiss, you might get a bit worried, but that is what it is supposed to do! The weight wiggles to release pressure to keep it at the desired internal pressure (assuming you are using a “weighted gauge” pressure canner).

Since a weighted gauge (WG) was mentioned, there is also a dial gauge (DG) pressure canner. With a weighted gauge the weight will wiggle or dance when it reaches the desired internal pressure. You will need to adjust the temperature of your range or stove so the weight does its dance as described in the owner’s manual. (Yes, you HAVE to read the manual to really understand how to use it!) Some WG weights wiggle constantly – others will wiggle once or twice every three minutes or so, and then there are some that just hiss at you when you least expect it. The Owner’s Manual for the specific pressure canner will tell you what yours should do.

A dial gauge canner requires that you babysit it. There is a “dead weight” on the vent pipe that will start wiggling if the pressure gets too high – usually over 15 lb., but it is there as a safety valve and nothing else. You need to adjust the heat of your range or burner to get the pressure on the dial gauge at the pressure that you want it to be. If it goes too high, you need to reduce the heat and vice versa. One other thing about the DG pressure canner that you should be aware that you need to get the gauge checked each year!! We (UCCE Office of El Dorado County) will test this gauge for you FREE of charge. During the pandemic we continue to test dial gauges. We have seen brand new dial gauges be off by over 2 psi! If one is off by more than 2 psi, you should replace it.

There are many different pressure canners on the market. Please be aware that a small pressure cooker (ie. Instant Pot, etc.) is NOT a canner. Here is a favorite quote – “You can COOK with a

Canner, but you can't CAN with a Cooker." A pressure canner CAN be used to cook food! It's actually good for those big pieces of meat!

We will hopefully have a hands-on workshop where you can CAN something and we will walk you through the process. Obviously this will be after the COVID pandemic eases up, but keep an eye out for future classes and workshops. We are working on a ZOOM demonstration class that will soon be available. In the meantime, here is a recipe for an easy beef stew:

Easy Beef Stew

Makes about 7 (32 oz) quarts

4 to 5 lb beef stew meat, cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes
1 Tbsp vegetable oil
12 cups cubed and peeled potatoes (about 12 medium)
8 cups sliced carrots (about 16 small)
3 cups chopped celery (about 5 stalks)
3 cups chopped onion (about 4 small)
1-1/2 Tbsp salt
1 tsp thyme
1/2 tsp pepper
Water

1. Prepare pressure canner. Heat jars in simmering water until ready for use. Do not boil. Wash lids in warm soapy water and set bands aside.
2. Brown meat in oil in a large saucepot. Add vegetables and seasonings to browned meat. Cover with boiling water. Bring stew to a boil. Remove from heat.
3. Ladle hot stew into hot jars leaving 1 inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe rim. Center hot lid on jar. Apply band and adjust until fit is fingertip tight.
4. Process filled jars in a pressure canner at 10 pounds pressure 1 hour and 15 minutes for pints and 1 hour and 30 minutes for quarts, adjusting for altitude. Turn off heat: cool canner to zero pressure. Let stand 5 more minutes before removing the lid. Cool jars in canner 10 minutes. Remove jars and cool. Check lids for seal after 24 hours. Lid should not flex up and down when center is pressed.

Source: Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving, 2012

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message on our helpline at (530) 621-5506. For more information about our public education classes and activities or to make a donation, go to the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfpc>. Sign up to receive our E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mfpcsenews>.

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