

Measurements in Home Preserving

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As UC Master Food Preservers we advocate for safe, science-based, home food preserving methods. Following tested recipes from safe sources is important. Sometimes even tested recipes can be confusing when it comes to down to measuring ingredients.

It is always smart to read your recipe thoroughly before starting a preserving project. Some recipes use weights in their ingredients list, such as canning tomatoes. Some recipes use cups to measure ingredients. The first example is straight forward, 20 pounds of tomatoes is 20 pounds, no matter what. The second example may lead to confusion depending on how it is worded. For example, “5 cups of strawberries, crushed” (measure first, then crush) is different than “5 cups of crushed strawberries” (crush first, then measure).

How do you know how many strawberries are needed per cup? Ball has a very handy Produce Purchasing Chart that answers this question. It can be found in some of the Ball canning books, and is also available for download here: https://ucanr.edu/sites/mfp_of_cs/files/333131.pdf. Print this Purchasing Guide and keep it with your other printed resources. It comes in very handy!

Having a scale to weigh food is very handy for preserving. A small compact digital scale that can weigh up to at least 10 pounds is recommended. Most tested recipes for produce such as tomatoes, corn, green beans, potatoes, beets, etc. are measured in pounds. Canning whole fruits like berries, apples, pears, peaches, and plums are also measured in pounds.

Other confusing terms are “chopped,” “cubed,” “diced,” and “minced.” It is best to think of these in terms of size. We often see the term “coarsely chopped.” This means cutting food into roughly cut pieces about 1/2-inch diameter. “Cubed” means chopping food into evenly sized pieces about 1/3- or 1/2-inch diameter. “Dice” means to cut food into cubes 1/4-inch diameter in size. “Mince” means to cut food evenly into very small pieces, about 1/8-inch diameter.

The size of the food called for in tested recipes is important. The processing times are based, in part, by how long it takes heat to penetrate the food. If, for example, a tested recipe stated to “dice” (1/4-inch) the produce and you “chop” (1/2-inch) the produce then your pieces will be bigger than the recipe called for, so your product may be under-processed and may not be shelf-stable. Botulism may have a chance to occur in canned vegetables.

“Mise en place!” This means prepare your work area. Read the recipe thoroughly before starting your project. Clean your work area. Get all your tools and ingredients out and ready to use. Get your canner ready and pre-heat your jars. If dehydrating, get all your trays cleaned and ready for use. Wash your vegetables and fruit. Weigh or pre-measure all your ingredients. Cut your produce or meat as directed in a tested recipe. This preparation will make your project not only easy to manage but will ensure success.

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your food safety and preserving questions. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmf@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program, events, and recipes, or to sign up to receive our events by email, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmf>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!