

Plan Today to Preserve Tomorrow



Before you know it, you'll be up to your ears in fresh garden pickin's. Make sure you're ready for the harvest so that you can enjoy every last bit of it!

Prepping For Your Preservation

With summer upon us, it's time to plan for a great season of home food preservation. The first step is to assess your canning equipment and supplies to ensure they are in proper working condition to assure safe, high-quality preserved foods.

Canning Jars and Lids

Assess the amount and condition of your canning jars to determine if additional bottles are needed. It is recommended

to only use Mason-type jars that are made specifically for home canning. Check the bottles for scratches, cracks, nicks or chips. Nicked or chipped bottle rims will not seal properly, and scratched bottles may cause cracking or breakage while processing, so it is best to dispose of those bottles. Bottles that are not made specifically for canning may break under high heat or pressure and may experience more seal failures. The same is true for very old Mason jars that have weakened over time.

Jars come in many sizes from half-pint to half-gallon, and it is important to use the jar size that is specified in a recipe. Half-gallon jars should only be used for canning very acidic juices such as apple juice or grape juice.

It is recommended to use two-piece flat metal lids and screwing bands for processing. The USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning states that gaskets in unused lids work well for at least five years from the manufacturing date. Do not use old, used, dented or deformed lids, but the screw bands are reusable as long as they are not bent, dented or rusted.

Boiling Water Canners

Boiling water canners, or water bath canners, are used for canning high-acid foods such as fruits, pickles, jams/jellies and acidified tomatoes. Most water bath canners are designed to hold seven quart jars or eight to nine pint jars. These canners are made of aluminum or porcelain-coated steel with a removable rack and a lid.

A water bath canner should be deep enough to allow at least an inch or two of boiling water to cover the bottles during processing. Flat bottom water bath canners are recommended for electric ranges and the canner should be no more than 4-inches wider in diameter than the electric element to ensure uniform processing of all the jars in the canner. Flat or ridged-bottom canners can be used on gas burners.

Pressure Canners

Low-acid foods, such as meat, poultry, fish, vegetables and dried beans, must be processed in a pressure canner. There are two types of pressure canners: dial-gauge and weighted-gauge. The dial gauge on pressure canners should be checked for accuracy every year. Inaccurate gauges that read high may cause under-processing resulting in unsafe food, and low readings cause over-processing.

Every pound of pressure is very important to the temperature needed inside the canner for properly processed food. Gauges may be checked at local Extension offices. Weighted-gauges do not need to be checked for accuracy. For most altitudes in Utah, weighted-gauges must be operated at a canner pressure of 15 PSI.

Useful Tools

Helpful tools for home canning include a jar lifter to aid in removing hot jars from the canner. A bubble remover frees air bubbles from inside the jar to aid in maintaining a proper headspace. Some bubble removers have a headspace measurer on one end. A lid lifter is a tool with a magnet on the end to lift lids from hot water.

A very important tool to have for food preservation is using research-tested recipes. The USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning has updated canning instructions. The National Center for Home Food Preservation (<http://nchfp.uga.edu/>) is another excellent source for current research-based recommendations for most methods of home food preservation. Most local Extension offices have current research-based information for safe home food preservation.

Proper planning now will help to ensure a successful canning season.

This article was written by Marie Anderson.

