

Scary Food Preservation Story

HOME FOOD
PRESERVATION

**SCARY
STORY**



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Stocking up on stories to keep you awake at night? Here's one just in time for Halloween.

One of the clerks at The Mending Shed in Orem told me of a man who came in to buy some canning supplies. He mentioned he was canning some taco soup—in half gallon jars. Startled, the clerk dug a bit deeper, asking about his pressure canning time for a half-gallon jar. The man responded, “Oh, no! the soup goes in the jars boiling hot, so the lids seal without any processing.”

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Taco soup, typically with tomatoes, peppers, ground beef, corn and beans, is low acid—to simply put it in a jar and onto the shelf is an ideal place for botulism to grow. There's no oxygen, it's wet, it's low acid, and it's a nice, comfortable room temperature. The protein coated spore produced by the *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria will open up, releasing and multiplying its deadly toxin. It's not a gas-former, it won't smell, it will just poison whoever is unfortunate enough to eat it.

Proper pressure canning time at temperatures above 240° F (which takes 13 to 15 pounds of pressure at our altitude) is the only way to destroy the spores of *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria.

Another FYI: Lids on canning jars will “seal” briefly with simply a change in temperature, but bacteria in the food has *not* been killed, and the seal will not last.

Don't “wake up dead” this Halloween! Use research-based canning recipes found on any Cooperative Extension site, the National Center for Home Food Preservation, or Ball Canning.

This article was written by Cathy Merrill, USU Extension Assistant Professor, Utah County