

Canning Fruits and Vegetables: How to Preserve

Learn the steps to properly cook and preserve food using a pressure canner and a water bath canner.

(From Canning Fruits and Vegetables, By Sue Weaver)

How To Preserve

Pressure Canner: Cook food according to specific canning recipe. Run two to three inches of hot water into the canner. Arrange packed, lidded jars on the rack and secure the canner's lid.

Heat at the highest setting until steam rushes from the uncovered vent or petcock.

Maintaining top heat, vent steam for 10 minutes, then close the petcock or place the weighted bobber on the vent.

Begin timing when the dial gauge indicates the correct pressure is up or when the weighted gauge begins to rock or jiggle.

Regulate heat to maintain pressure at or slightly above the recommended gauge pressure. If it drops below that point, bring the pressure back up and begin timing from the beginning.

When the time is up, switch off the heat and let the canner depressurize at room temperature. You'll know it's depressurized when its dial gauge returns to zero or the canner doesn't hiss when its weighted gauge is gently nudged.

When depressurized, open the petcock or remove the weighted bobber. Wait 5 minutes. Unfasten the lid and lift it away from you so out-rushing steam doesn't singe your face.

Remove jars with a lifter and arrange them on towels or a rack (never a cold, bare surface) to cool, allowing at least an inch between jars.

Water Bath Canner: Cook food according to specific canning recipe. Fill the canner halfway full of water. Place clean towels in the bottom if you're not using a canning rack. Heat to 140 degrees for cold-packed foods, 180 degrees for hot-pack.

Arrange packed, lidded jars on the rack and lower it into the water or use a jar lifter to place jars into the rack or submerged towels, one at a time.

Add enough boiling water to cover the jars by at least one inch. Don't pour it directly on the jars.

Turn heat to its highest setting until water boils briskly; cover the canner and begin timing according to your recipe.

Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle boil throughout processing. Add more boiling water as needed.

When time is up, switch off the heat, remove the lid, and fish out the jars using a jar lifter. Place them on towels or a rack (never a cold, bare surface) to cool, allowing at least an inch between jars.

Storing home canned food: When fully cooled (12 to 24 hours later), remove screw bands, leaving only flat lids on the jars. Wash, rinse and dry the bands before storing.

Test the lid seals by gently thumping them with the back of a teaspoon. A clear, ringing sound indicates a good seal, as does a concave lid.

Remove lids from unsealed or dubious jars and check their rims for nicks and irregularities. Transfer the food to another jar if necessary and fully reprocess it within 24 hours. Or refrigerate and freeze or eat it within 24 hours.

Wash each sealed jar and lid, rinse and dry. Label and date them.

Store canned food in a clean, dark, dry spot away from heat sources such as water heaters, furnaces, kitchen ranges, hot

pipes and direct sun. Avoid attics and storage buildings.

Hot pack, cold pack:
What does it mean?

HOT: To hot pack fruits and tomatoes, preheat them in boiling syrup, juice or water, loosely pack into warm jars, seal, then process the jars in a water-bath canner. Because they're partially cooked, hot packed products require less processing time. Shrinkage has already occurred, so more food can be packed into each jar. Best hot packed: Tomatoes, apples, applesauce and rhubarb.

COLD: Cold pack (aka "raw pack") works best for delicate items like raspberries.

Cold packing is quicker and easier but requires longer processing times. To cold pack fruits, cram them tightly into jars, pour on boiling syrup, juice or water, enough to fill spaces and submerge their contents and process as above.

Apricots, most berries, cherries, peaches, pears and plums can be hot or cold packed, whichever you prefer.

Either method: leave enough head space (check your recipe; usually 1½ to one inch between food and lid) to allow for fruit expansion and bubbling liquids.

And remove excess air prior to sealing by inserting a rubber spatula, plastic knife or a chopstick between each jar and its contents and coaxing those bubbles free.