

# UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Cooperative Extension Service  
224 S. Main, Suite B-10 • Sheridan, WY 82801  
(307) 674-2980 • (307) 675-2988 (fax)



## Canning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century/Canning FAQs

Canning has made quite a bit of progress since it was first invented over 200 years ago. Scientific advancements have greatly improved our ability to preserve food safely—even in the comforts of our own home. Unfortunately, not all home canners are aware of the current canning recommendations. Hopefully my answers to the following questions that I commonly hear will help to alleviate some of the confusion.

**Q. Is it okay to can my famous home-made salsa recipe?**

A. Sorry, but no—this one disappoints a lot of folks. Water-bath canning works because of the time and temperature of the canning process, *as well as* the acidity of the food. Unless the recipe is from a reliable source, we cannot be sure that it has been tested and proven safe. This is why I only recommend recipes from Extension offices as well as some of the reputable manufacturers.

**Q. What is wrong with the open kettle method?**

A. In this method, food is cooked in an ordinary kettle, then packed into hot jars and sealed without processing. Temperatures in open kettle canning may not be high enough to destroy spoilage organisms that may be in food. Spoilage bacteria may also enter the food while being transferred from kettle to jar.

**Q. If the jar seals, am I assured the food will be safe to eat?**

A. Not necessarily. It takes a lot less heat to seal the lid than to properly process the contents of the jar. If you followed directions correctly, you can be sure the food will keep and be safe to eat. That is why it is very important to select the correct method and follow directions carefully.

**Q. Can I use lime juice instead of lemon juice in my canning recipes?**

A. Yes, this is one occasion where I'll allow a substitution. As they both have a pH of 2-2.2 they can be used interchangeably.

**Q. Is it all right to can frostbitten vegetables?**

A. Yes. For best quality, can them as soon as possible after the frost hits. However, the texture of the vegetables where frozen will be poor. Tomatoes from frost-killed vines should not be canned (this can affect their acidity).

**Q. How long may canned foods be stored?**

A. The recommended storage time for home-canned foods is one year. However, a period of two to three years is considered a reasonable storage time. With longer storage the eating quality and nutrient content of the food will drop.

**Q. Can I speed the cooling process by running cold water over my canner?**

A. No. Never try to rush cooling or any other processing procedures. Recommended heat-up and cool-down periods are necessary to ensure a safe product. In addition, rapid cooling may break the jars or cause damage to your canner.

Don't forget you also need to adjust recipes for altitude! If water-bath canning, increase processing time by two minutes for every 1,000 feet above sea level, or just one minute/1,000ft if the recipe calls for less than 20 minutes processing time. When pressure canning increase the pressure by ½ pound/1,000ft to ensure a safe product.

The Sheridan County Extension office is planning a series of food preservation workshops beginning in August. Please call our office (674-2980) ASAP if you're interested—the class is filling up quickly! In addition, up-to-date canning literature is always available at our office, or online at <http://www.sheridancounty.com/info/coop/overview.php>. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at [kwillis3@uwyo.edu](mailto:kwillis3@uwyo.edu).*

***Note: feel free to take out one of the questions for publishing if this article is too long***