



Canning in the 21st Century/Canning FAQs

Canning foods for preservation 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 and consistency of the food. Some home recipes could be too thick to allow adequate heat penetration, or may not be acidic enough to be canned safely. 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 adequate to destroy spoilage organisms in the 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. 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 diminish.

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.

Your local extension office is a great source for tested recipes, canning questions, or even to test your pressure canning gauge. We also host many canning workshops this time of year, so give us a call if you're interested in being contacted about our next workshop. 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 Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*