Preserve Summer’s Bounty

Who doesn’t look forward to luscious ripe tomatoes, fresh green beans that snap just right, and juicy peaches in summer? Why not save some of these foods to enjoy later when they aren’t so plentiful?

Home canning is a wonderful way to preserve fresh fruits and vegetables from your garden or the local farmers’ market.

Many people think that preserving food is a difficult process to learn, but it really is so easy to preserve once you understand the basic principles.

Home canning should start with garden-fresh fruits and vegetables, the right equipment, and a time-proven method for success. Difficult economic times, and a focus on locally grown produce has lead to increased interest in home food preservation.

One very important aspect of preserving foods is safety. Home food preservation-linked botulism may rise due to increased consumption of foods that aren’t processed using safe canning steps.

There are two basic methods of canning:

A. Pressure Canner Method, which superheats low-acid foods and kills harmful bacteria, and
B. Boiling Water Bath Method, which processes high-acid foods at high heat, destroying bacteria, enzymes, molds, and yeast.

Process high-acid foods in a boiling water canner. Acid foods include jellies, jams, preserves, marmalades.

Process low-acid foods in a steam pressure canner. Low-acid foods include vegetables, meats, poultry, seafood, and combination recipes.

Step-by-Step Instructions for Safe Food Preservation

Step 1
- Select quality fruits and vegetables at the peak of freshness
- Select and prepare a tested home canning recipe from a canning or food preservation book
- Assemble jars, lids, metal rings, and canning equipment
  - Use only recommended canning jars.
  - Do not use jars that are chipped or cracked
  - Always buy new lids (flats). Do not reuse lids.
Step 2
- Wash jars, lids and rings (bands) in hot soapy water. Rinse well. Dry rings and set aside. Heat jars and lids in hot, but not boiling, water (180°F). Keep hot until used.

Step 3
- Fill hot jars with prepared recipe. Leave headspace of ¼ inch to ½ inch from rim of jar.

Step 4
- Remove air bubbles by sliding a non-metallic spatula between the jar and the food to release trapped air. Repeat several times.

Step 5
- Wipe rim and sides of jar with a clean damp cloth
- Center heated lid on jar
- Screw ring down by hand, evenly and firmly, until a point of resistance is met.

Step 6
- Place jars in canner to canner capacity. Process filled jars following the method and time indicated in the recipe. Do not shorten the recommended processing times or use a lower pressure.

Step 7
- When processing time is complete, cool pressure canner according to manufacturer’s instructions. If processing in water bath, remove from water and cool jars 12-24 hours.

Step 8
- When jars are cool, test for a seal by pressing down on the center of the lid. If the lid flexes up and down, the jar is not sealed. Canned food may be safely re-canned if the lack of seal is discovered within 24 hours. If that happens, remove the lid, check for nicks or irregularities in the rim of the jar. Change the jar if necessary. Add a new treated lid and reprocess using the same processing time.

Step 9
- Wipe sealed jars with a clean damp cloth and store in a cool dry place.

Inspect foods prior to consumption. Be suspicious of cloudy liquids, and unusual food discoloration. These may be an indication of food spoilage, depending on the type of food processed.

For best quality, nutritional value, and food safety, it is recommended that canned foods be consumed within a one year of being processed.

Preserving the fresh fruits and vegetables of summer is easy, and best of all, it captures the essence of the season.

For more information about home food preservation, contact your local UF IFAS Extension office to find out when classes on home canning are being offered this summer.

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Source: USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning; So Easy to Preserve, 5th Edition
Photo Credit: Kay Brown, Escambia County