



Lewis County

Master Food Preserver

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

Food Safety and  
Preservation



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## Do's & Don't for Successful Home Canning

### Ensure a Good Seal

#### Do's

- **Do** use standard canning jars, lids and screwbands.
- **Do** use jars free of nicks, cracks, or dips on the sealing surface.
- **Do** inspect lids for dents or scratches, narrow or incomplete ring of sealant.
- **Do** follow headspace and other directions in current canning guide. Use recommended processing methods and times given in current canning guide.
- **Do** use a dampened paper towel to remove food particles from jar sealing surface.
- **Do** turn screw bands to firm fingertip-tight. If screwbands are too tight, air cannot vent during processing and lids will buckle; if screwbands are too loose, vacuum will be low, and seals may fail now or later.
- **Do** use a jar lifter to insert and remove jars from canner.
- **Do** test for seal after jars have cooled for 12-24 hours. Remove the screwbands and check by doing the following: 1) Press the middle of the lid with a finger or thumb. If the lid springs up when you release your finger, the lid is unsealed. 2) Tap the lid with the bottom of a teaspoon. If it makes a dull sound, the lid is not sealed. If food is in contact with the underside do the lid, it will also cause a dull sound. If the jar is sealed correctly, it will make a ringing, high-pitched sound. 3) Hold the jar at eye level and look across the lid. The lid should be concave (curved down slightly in the center); if it is flat or bulging it may not be sealed.
- **Do** reprocess jars that did not seal within 24 hours. Use new lids and reprocess for the original processing time and method.
- **Do** remove screwbands when jars are cool. Wash jars, rinse and dry. Mark jar clearly with date and product.

#### Don'ts

- **Don't** use commercial food jar (such as mayonnaise jars). They have less glass and differ on the jar finish, sealing surface, and mouth diameter and thread pitch. Their capacities differ and safe processing times have not been established.
- **Don't** use commercial on-piece caps over lids as a substitute for screwbands. Inaccurate fit and the chance of lids to wedge increase the risk of sealing failure.
- **Don't use screwbands with rust, dents or stripped treads.**
- **Don't** use lids more than once.
- **Don't** leave the screwbands on the jar while food is in storage. Remove after jars have cooled after 12-24 hours, wash and store for next use.
- **Don't** use the Open-Kettle method. A jar will sometimes seal with the Open-Kettle method, but the seal is NOT a good vacuum seal and the food is more susceptible to spoilage organisms.
- **Don't** tighten screwbands after processing as this could break the seal.
- **Don't** shake or turn jars upside down once filled. Avoid contact of the lid with food during processing and storage to retain a good seal.
- **Don't** cover hot jars with a towel or blanket.
- **Don't** force-cool jars after processing. Sudden temperature changes can result in jar breakage.

## **Ensure Quality Canned Food and Prevent Spoilage**

### **Do's**

- **Do** assemble and examine equipment before each canning season.
- **Do** follow step-by-step directions from current canning guide. Copyright must be 1989 or newer. Measure ingredients accurately.
- **Do** can fruits and vegetables soon after harvest, at their quality peak. Use high-quality, firm-ripe fresh foods. Wash dirt from fruit and vegetables. Cut away damaged spots.
- **Do** sterilize jars if processing for less than 10 minutes.
- **Do** pack fruits and vegetables in liquid to retain firmness and color.
- **Do** remove air bubbles with a nonmetallic utensil. Metal utensils can cause jar breakage.
- **Do** make adjustments for altitude in your area. Go online to <http://veloroutes.org/elevation/>
- **Do** store jar in a cool dry place.
- **Do** open and boil all low-acid tomato foods for 10 minutes before tasting if you are not confident that they are safe.
- **Do** process high-acid foods (fruits, acidified tomatoes, jellied and pickled products) in a Boiling Water Bath Canner.

### **Don'ts**

- **Don't** unnecessarily expose prepared foods to air. Prepare only enough food for one canner load at time.
- **Don't** substitute ingredients or alter directions given in current tested recipes.
- **Don't** process in conventional ovens, microwave ovens, steamers or dishwashers.
- **Don't** pack cold food in jars. Food should be at least room temperature, liquids should be boiling.
- **Don't** pack food too tightly or too loosely in jars.

### **For Safe Boiling Water Canning**

- **Do** start timing when water returns to a full rolling boil.
- **Do** make sure jars are covered by at least 1-inch of boiling water during the entire processing time.
- **Do** keep cover on canner during entire processing time.
- **Do** let jars sit in water bath for 5 minutes with lid off after processing time is finished before removing them.
- **Do** keep water boiling continually. If water stops boiling, start processing time over again.
- **Do** process low-acid foods (vegetables, meat, poultry and fish) in the Pressure Canner. Bacteria which cause botulism food poisoning can grow in a low-acid, air-tight environment. The higher temperature (240°F) is necessary to destroy bacteria and ensure food safety.

### **For Safe Pressure Canning**

- **Do** have gauge type canner checked every canning season to make sure gauge is accurate and seals are good. If pressure canning year round have gauge tested twice a year. The WSU extension office tests gauges by appointment year round and holds gauge testing clinics seasonally.
- **Do** replace cracked or work gasket to prevent water leakage and pressure loss.
- **Do** clean vent tube for collected food particles.
- **Do** gently exhaust steam for 10 minutes before placing weight on vent port or closing petcock.
- **Do** maintain correct pressure without fluctuating heat. Weighted gauge should jiggle 3-4 times per minute. Dial gauge should read at or slightly above correct pressure.
- **Do** allow canner to depressurize naturally. Force-cooling or opening vent could result in loss of liquid from jars, causing sealing failures and food spoilage.
- **Do** remove lid and let jars sit for 10 minutes before removing.

## **Identifying and Handling Spoiled Canned Food**

**Do not taste food from a jar with an unsealed lid or food that shows signs of spoilage.** You can more easily detect some types of spoilage in jars stored without screw bands. Growth of spoilage bacteria and yeast produces gas which pressurizes the food, swells lids, and breaks jar seals. As each stored jar is selected for use, examine its lid for tightness and vacuum. Lids with concave centers have good seals.

Next, while holding the jar upright at eye level, rotate the jar and examine its outside surface for streaks of dried food originating at the top of the jar. Look at the contents for rising air bubbles and unnatural color.

While opening the jar, smell for unnatural odors and look for spurting liquid and cotton-like mold growth (white, blue, black, or green) on the top food surface and underside of lid.

Spoiled low-acid foods, including tomatoes, may exhibit different kinds of spoilage evidence or very little evidence. Therefore, all suspect containers of spoiled low-acid foods, including tomatoes, should be treated as having produced botulinum toxin and handled carefully in one of two ways:

- If the suspect glass jars are still sealed, place them in a heavy garbage bag. Close and place the bag in a regular trash container or dispose in a nearby landfill.
- If the suspect cans or glass jars are unsealed, open, or leaking, they should be detoxified before disposal.

**Detoxification process:** Wear disposable rubber or heavy plastic gloves. Carefully place the suspect containers and lids on their sides in an 8-quart volume or larger stock pot, pan, or boiling-water canner. Wash your hands with gloves thoroughly. Carefully add water to the pot and avoid splashing the water. The water should completely cover the containers with a minimum of a 1-inch level above the containers. Place a lid on the pot and heat the water to boiling. Boil 30 minutes to ensure detoxifying the food and all container components. Cool and discard the containers, their lids, and food in the trash or dispose in a nearby landfill.

**Cleaning up the area:** Contact with botulinum toxin can be fatal whether it is ingested or enters through the skin. Take care to avoid contact with suspect foods or liquids. Wear rubber or heavy plastic gloves when handling suspect foods or cleaning up contaminated work surfaces and equipment. A fresh solution of 1 part unscented liquid household chlorine bleach (5 to 6% sodium hypochlorite) to 5 parts clean water should be used to treat work surfaces, equipment, or other items, including can openers and clothing, that may have come in contact with suspect foods or liquids. Spray or wet contaminated surfaces with the bleach solution and let stand for 30 minutes. Wearing gloves, wipe up treated spills with paper towels being careful to minimize the spread of contamination. Dispose of these paper towels by placing them in a plastic bag before putting them in the trash. Next, apply the bleach solution to all surfaces and equipment again, and let stand for 30 minutes and rinse. As a last step, thoroughly wash all detoxified counters, containers, equipment, clothing, etc. Discard gloves when cleaning process is complete. (Note: Bleach is an irritant itself and should not be inhaled or allowed to come in contact with the skin.)