

Canning Tips

Over the past several years many new people have tried canning. Whether to save money or know the quality of food your family is eating, more and more people these days are canning. Some of those entries have made their way to the Home & Garden Canning Show but have not been placed, or worse, been disqualified. Following some simple and SAFE tips can get you that Blue Ribbon!

We thought we would take some time to put together some canning tips for the novice!

Preparation: Always use proper canning jars (e.g., Ball or Kerr) and inspect them for cracks or nicks.

Using proper canning jars (such as Mason-type jars) is essential to ensure food safety, prevent breakage from high temperatures and pressure, and guarantee a proper vacuum seal. These tempered glass jars are designed to withstand thermal shock and safely store food, whereas commercial jars (e.g., mayonnaise jars) can shatter and do not seal reliably.

Also keep jars warm after washing until filled to prevent breakage.

Safety First: Never substitute ingredients, particularly in pressure canning. Follow processing details.

Tested recipes are important because ingredients and processing times and method, ensure proper pH and heat penetration needed to destroy bacteria. Changing the recipe changes the pH, and not processing according to the recipe may not kill all the bacteria.

Headspace Matters: Follow the recipe exactly for headspace—the gap between the food and the lid—usually 1/4 to 1/2 inch.

Headspace is the space between the food and the lid. The space ensures a proper vacuum seal and prevents spoilage. It allows for food expansion during heating, preventing food from bubbling over and clogging the seal, while too much space prevents proper air venting, causing discoloration or weak seals.

Correct spacing preserves quality, safety, and texture.

Lids and Seal Prep: Use new lids for every jar to ensure a proper vacuum seal. Also wipe the rim of the jar with a damp cloth or vinegar to remove any food particles before applying the lid to prevent seal failure. We listen for that “pop” when opening your entries.

Bands and Tightness: Screw bands should be tightened only to "finger-tip tight"—not overly forced.

Allows Air to Escape (Venting):

During heating, air and steam in the jar must escape to create a vacuum. If the band is too tight, air cannot escape, preventing a proper seal.

Prevents Buckled Lids:

If the air cannot escape because the ring is too tight, it will try to force its way out, causing the metal lid to buckle, bend, or warp.

Prevents Seal Failures:

Over-tightened bands can distort the metal lid or tear the rubber sealing compound, resulting in a failed, unsafe seal.

Prevents Broken Jars:

Too much pressure from over-tightening, combined with heat, can lead to cracked or broken jars.

Cooling: Place hot jars on a towel or rack, not a cold counter, and leave 1-2 inches between them, allowing them to cool for 12-24 hours without touching them.