Get Ready…

It's time to make sure your food preservation equipment is ready and in good condition for your preserving tasks. Check your pressure canner's rubber gasket which should be soft and flexible, not stiff, sticky or cracked. Make sure openings are open by pulling a string or pushing a toothpick through the openings.

Dial gauges on pressure canners must be tested for accuracy before each canning season. For information on testing a dial gauge, contact your county University of Minnesota Extension Office to see if testing is done locally. If not, wrap the gauge securely and send it to Presto for testing - free of charge: National Presto Industries, Inc., 3925 N. Hastings Way, Eau Claire, WI 54703-3703 (1-800-877-0441).

Check your canning jars. Rub your finger around the jar rim to feel for chips or cracks which can prevent the lid from sealing. If you notice any cracks or scratches on the jars, do not use them for canning. If the jars are old and have been used many times in the pressure canner, they will be weaker. Consider using these jars for products that do not require long processing times.

Rings can be reused but if they are rusty, bent or dented, replace them. Purchase new flat lids. Do not use lids that have been in your basement for one, two or more years!

Food Preservation Questions?

Whether you’re making your first batch of salsa or you’ve been canning for years, you probably have some questions. Where to go for answers? AnswerLine: Talk to food preservation experts by calling toll-free 1-800-854-1678.

AnswerLine is staffed Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. After hours, check the website: www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/

AnswerLine provides research-based answers to your questions. This free service is provided by the University of Minnesota Extension and collaborating partners.
Wash Produce before Preserving

It is important to clean fresh produce before eating or preserving even if they will be peeled. Washing fruits and vegetables reduces the chance of bacteria from the soil and any trace amounts of chemicals from sprays that could contaminate the produce.

Before washing produce, make sure your hands, equipment and working surfaces are clean.

- Work in small quantities to prevent loss of quality and nutrients.
- Wash produce with clean running water that is close to the temperature of the produce. If the water temperature is too warm or too cold, any bacteria near an opening may get “sucked” into the produce and contaminate it.
- Wash and drain produce BEFORE removing caps, cores, pits, seeds, skins, or shells.
- Wash through several changes of clean water in a clean sink. Use water at a temperature close to the temperature of the produce.
- Wash produce with rinds and skins using a vegetable brush under running water.
- Lift produce out of the water so the dirt is washed off and will not get back on the food.
- Do not let produce soak in water.
- Do not use soap or bleach to wash produce. These products may change the flavor and may not be safe to consume.

Pectin Products with a Different Look

Look through the canning section in your favorite store and you might see pectin in small jars. The amount of pectin in these jars is equal to three to four boxes of powdered pectin. According to the instructions, you can add or subtract the amount of pectin for your recipe.

Be aware that purchasing pectin in bulk form is convenient but the jam or jelly consistency may not be the same as your previous results using boxes. For best results, do not make more than eight cups of jam or jelly at one time. When working with large amounts, the jelling capacity of the pectin is affected.

You may also find pectin in a small envelope that makes only two half-pint jars. This will be attractive to people who like to experiment with a new recipe or for people who do not want to make a large number of jars of one flavor of jam or jelly.

Some pectin forms tend to lose their jelling potential over time. As a result, try to use pectin before the expiration date whether you purchase it in bulk, a small envelope or in the original box format.
Making Freezer Jam

Freezer jams are easy to make and a fun activity to get the kids involved in too! Raspberries, strawberries and blackberries produce tasty uncooked freezer jams. To the berries you will add pectin, sugar and sometimes lemon juice. Powdered pectin and liquid pectin boxes include a variety of freezer jam recipes with step-by-step directions.

Once the jam is made and placed in freezer containers, an important step is to allow the jam to stand on the counter for 24 hours, or until the jam has set and become firm. Then place the jam in the freezer to prevent spoilage by molds or yeast and to maintain color and flavor. Once you open the container, keep refrigerated and use the jam within two to three weeks.

If you wish to reduce the amount of sugar, use modified low or no sugar pectin that allows you to do so. Follow pectin package directions carefully.

Freezer jam is less firm than cooked jam but has more of a fresh-fruit taste.

It’s a “Berry” Good Time of the Year!

We know summer has arrived when we bite into a juicy sweet strawberry or a tasty ripe raspberry.

Food preservation season begins with preserving berries: frozen, canned, dried, or jams and jellies. The freezing of berries is a great place for a “new” food preserver to develop their skills.

Preserve fruits as soon as possible after harvest and at their peak of ripeness.

To clean, place berries in a colander, dip into cool water, and gently swish, drain. Do not soak berries in water.

Fruit can be frozen with sugar, in a sugar water syrup, or unsweetened. Unsweetened fruits lose quality faster than those packed in sugar or sugar syrups.

A convenient way to freeze berries is to tray pack. Simply spread a single layer of berries on a shallow tray and freeze. When frozen, promptly package, label, and return to the freezer. Most frozen fruits maintain high quality for 8 to 12 months when frozen in quality freezer containers. Be sure to maintain your freezer temperature at 0°F or below.

Whether you have your own strawberry patch, visit a “pick-your-own”, or stop by a farmers’ market, you have wonderful access to berries, and that is a “berry” good thing!

New Freezer Containers

Every year, companies develop products to make food preservation less time-consuming, produce better quality preserved foods or fit into our 21st century lifestyle easier. Jarden Home Brands, makers of Ball® and Kerr® canning products, developed a new freezer container to keep frozen produce fresh longer. The Ball Freezer Containers with Locking Lid Design are heavy-duty containers and may help prevent freezer burn which affects the quality and flavor of the frozen product. The containers include an air-tight seal and a locking lid that is supposed to help protect against off-flavors, unwanted odors and spills in the freezer. The bottom of the container is ridged to allow for better cold-air circulation. Freshness date dials on the lid let you know exactly how long the container has been in your freezer.
Herb Vinegars

Tarragon, dill, parsley, rosemary, thyme and combinations of herbs produce vinegars that enhance the flavor of salads, marinades and sauces. They are easy to make.

Quick tips:

- Pick fresh herbs, before blossom and after the morning dew has dried.
- Select glass jars or bottles that are washed and sterilized in simmering hot water for 10 minutes.
- Allow 3-4 springs of herb per pint (2 cups) of vinegar.
- Store in a cool, dark place. Let set for 3-4 weeks to develop flavors.

For information on creating flavored vinegars see Flavored Vinegars article.

Is there a safe process for preserving pickled radishes?

At the present time, there is no approved process for safe canning of pickled radishes by the USDA Canning Guide and National Center for Home Food Preservation. In order to be safe for consumption, a canned product must have an approved process (time and temperature) to make sure the product is safe for storing at room temperature. However, there are a lot of recipes for preparing pickled radishes that are very safe if you store them in the refrigerator.

Frequently Asked Questions

I have seen reusable canning lids (Tattler) on the internet. Are they safe to use?

Elizabeth Andress, Extension Food Safety Specialist – Department of Foods and Nutrition, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension and National Center for Home Food Preservation shares the following response: “The Tattler lids have been around a long time, but I have never used them or known of them being used in any reported research (ie, publicly available research). If people want to use them, they just need to go by the guidance provided by the company/manufacturer. I have no information that would tell me anything about seal failures or sealing rates, number of re-uses and performance throughout re-uses. I do not know what kind of vacuum levels are achieved, which would indicate how much air/oxygen gets vented out of the jar during processing. The lid choice itself would not impact the safety of the canning heat process if used on the correct shape and size of canning jar as the process specifies, and all other canning recommendations for jar filling, canner use, food preparation style, etc., are followed. So if people want to try them, they just need to be sure they can tell how to be sure they have a vacuum seal on their jar after processing and throughout storage.”

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If you would like to stop receiving the Home Food Preservation newsletter, please email schmi374@umn.edu.

For more food safety information visit our website: extension.umn.edu/foodsafety/.