

# DOs & DON'Ts FOR SUCCESSFUL HOME CANNING

## *Ensure a Good Seal*

### DOs

- 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, scratches or narrow or incomplete ring of sealant.
- DO prepare lids by placing them in a pan and pouring boiling water over them. (*Don't boil lids, as sealant may over-soften.*) Let them stay in the hot water for at least 3 minutes or until ready to use.
- 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 screwbands firmly tight. Unless you are unusually strong, this means as tightly as you can without forcing. 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. Check with the 3-way test: 1) Press the center of the lid. If it is down and will not move, it is sealed; 2) If the lid looks concave (*curved down*), it is sealed; 3) Tap the lid with a spoon, if a clear ringing sound is heard, it is 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.
- DO avoid extreme changes in storage temperatures.

### DON'Ts

- DON'T use commercial food jars (*such as mayonnaise jars*). They have less glass and differ on the jar finish, sealing surface, mouth diameter, and thread pitch. Their capacities differ and safe processing times have not been established. They are bruised in food production lines and there is a higher risk of under-sterilization, sealing failure, low vacuum, and jar breakage.
- DON'T use commercial one-piece caps over lids as a substitute for screwbands. Inaccurate fit and the chance for lids to wedge increase the risk of sealing failure.
- DON'T use screwbands with rust, dents, or stripped threads.
- DON'T use lids more than once.
- DON'T use the Open-Kettle method. This involves pouring hot food into the jar, putting on the lid and screwband, without further processing. 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.

For further information, please contact:

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# DOs & DON'Ts FOR SUCCESSFUL HOME CANNING

*Ensure Quality Canned Food and Prevent Spoilage*

## DOs

- DO assemble and examine equipment before each canning season.
- DO follow step-by-step directions from current canning guide. 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. Call your local Extension Service for altitude information.
- DO store jars in a cool, dark dry place.
- DO open and boil all low-acid and tomato foods for 10 minutes before tasting. *(Call your local Extension Service for adjustments for altitudes above 1,000 feet.)*
- DO process high-acid foods *(fruits, acidified tomatoes, jellied, and pickled products)* in the BOILING WATER CANNER.

## 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 entire processing time.
- DO keep cover on canner during entire processing time.
- 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 PRESURE 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 check gauge-type canner with Extension Service before each canning season.
- DO replace cracked or worn 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.

## DON'Ts

- DON'T unnecessarily expose prepared foods to air. Prepare only enough food for one canner load at a time.
- DON'T substitute ingredients or alter directions given in current tested recipes.
- DON'T process in conventional ovens, microwave ovens, steamers, or dishwashers, as these practices do not prevent all risk of spoilage.
- 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.

## SIGNS OF SPOILAGE

- Mold growth on food surface.
- Lid is sealed but bulging. **DO NOT OPEN. DISCARD.**
- Lid is unsealed or leaking. Liquid spurts, gas bubbles, off-color, off-smell, cotton-like mold growth. **DO NOT TASTE!** Boil jar, lid, and contents for 30 minutes to kill harmful microbes and prevent animal poisoning. **DISCARD.**