

## Preserving What You Grow!

Martha B. Maddox, CEA IV, Family & Consumer Sciences  
UF/IFAS Extension, Alachua County

Many of us grow a garden to enjoy the fresh produce, share with our friends and family and to preserve for using later. Whether you are canning, freezing, pickling, drying, curing, and smoking, fermenting, or making jam and jelly you need to follow current food safety guidelines from the National Center for Home Food Preservation. The National Center for Home Food Preservation weblink is <https://setp.uga.edu/> (So Easy to Preserve).

In this article I will discuss the steps of canning high and low acid foods. The first thing we need to do anytime we handle and prepare food is practice food safety guidelines. First wash your hands and clean your working area. Next gather and prepare the materials needed. Make sure you wear appropriate clothing and hair restraint. Select the product and examine produce carefully to make sure it is free from insects and rotten spots. Now cut out any damaged spots and wash and rinse your product making sure vegetables and fruit are dirt free.

When selecting food to be preserved you should select the best, top quality ingredients. Select fruits and vegetables at peak of ripeness. You will need the basic equipment such as: cooking timer, food scale, standard canning jars, lids and bands, funnels, jar lifters, boiling water bath canner, steam-pressure canner, and recipes.



Your recipes should be current and tested. It should provide the following information: should tell the appropriate method for food type such as if you should pressure can, or water bath can. It should give you the specific processing time for the food type along with the proper amount of headspace you need. You should never change ingredients or amounts. Also follow the tested recipe as written.

The canning method that is approved for a food depends on the type of food you plan to preserve. Foods are divided into two main categories: those that contain acid and those that have very little or no acid. Low acid foods have a pH value higher than 4.6 and include red meats, seafood, poultry, milk, and all fresh vegetables except most tomatoes. High Acid foods have a pH value of 4.6 or lower and include fruits, pickles, sauerkraut, jams, jellies, marmalades, fruit butters. The water bath canning method should be used when canning high acid foods. The pressure canning method should be used when canning low acid foods. Be sure to read your recipe and follow the National Center for Home Food Preservation guidelines when canning all food items.

The next step in preparing to can is preparing the jars. Always follow manufacturer's directions, inspect for nicks, cracks, uneven edges, or sharp edges on each jar. Next place the jars in a large stockpot and cover the jars with water. Place on high



heat and bring water to simmer (180°F): reduce heat and keep jars hot until ready to use. You will also need to prepare the lids. Prepare the lids by placing lids in small saucepan, cover them with water and bring to a simmer (180°F); and keep lids hot until ready to use. DO NOT boil lids.

After you have reviewed the recipe, gathered equipment, and prepared the jars and lids you need to inspect the canner you plan to use. For **low acid food canning** you will use the steam pressure canner. Check the lid and gasket to ensure airtight seal, clean the vent pipe and fill the canner with 2 to 3 inches of water. Place the canner over high heat and bring to simmer (180°F). Keep the canner at simmer until jars are filled and placed in the canner. Proceed with filling jars with food, adding lids and bands. Be sure to allow 1 inch headspace for all low acid foods. Once jars are filled with food place jar in canner. Gradually adjust heat to achieve and maintain recommended pounds of pressure. When the time is complete, remove the canner from heat and let the canner stand undisturbed until pressure drops naturally to zero. Be sure to wait 10 minutes before removing the lid. Also, be sure to open lid so steam is directed away from you. Lift jars from canner without tilting and place upright on towel to cool. Cool jar undisturbed for 24 hours before you check lids for seal and removing bands. Wipe jars with a clean, damp cloth and dry, label each jar and store in a cool, dry, dark place. For best quality, use within one year.

For **high acid food canning** review the recipe and assemble equipment. Prepare jars and lids and prepare food as recipe directs. Fill the hot jars one at a time and allow proper headspace, per recipe directions, next remove air bubbles from the jar. Wipe the jar rim and threads of jar before you apply lid and band, “fingertip tight”. (Your canning rack should already be in your canner with simmering water from heating jars.) Place each jar in the canner until canning rack is filled. Be sure water covers jars by at least 1”. (If you need to add water, make sure it is at the same temperature as water in the canner. Have an extra pot of water simmering just in case you need it to fill the canner.)

Place the lid on canner and turn heat to medium high. Begin counting processing time when the water returns to a full rolling boil. When time has elapsed, turn off heat and remove canner lid. Be sure to wait 5 minutes before removing jars. Remove jars by lifting jars out of the canner, without tilting, and place them upright on a towel to cool. Cool jars undisturbed for 24 hours and when they are cooled, check lids for seal. Store as directed for low acid foods.



One question I receive frequently is how to properly check to see if jars have sealed. When checking for seal wait 24 hours from taking jars from canner to make sure all jars have cooled. Check lids for seal by pressing on center of lid. If lid is pulled down and does not flex up or down, jar is sealed. Next remove band from the jar. Lids that cannot be easily removed with fingertips have a good seal. Jars that have not sealed should be refrigerated and the food used within two to three days. You can also reprocess food within 24 hours or freeze food.

In review always follow food safety guidelines when preparing any food item and when canning follow current food safety guidelines from the National Center for Home Food Preservation. For more information on food preservation or upcoming educational workshops contact your local UF/IFAS Extension Office. In Alachua County call 352-955-2402 or email Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Martha Maddox at [mmaddox@ufl.edu](mailto:mmaddox@ufl.edu) in memo line put food preservation information/question.