

Food Preservation 3

Today we conclude a three-part series on canning with tips to consider when you have completed the canning process. Because you selected quality food, followed the directions for proper food preparation and used the appropriate canning method, your kitchen countertop should now be covered with jars and jars of lovely fruits and vegetables.

If you had a lid that failed to seal, you may want to reprocess it. Remove the lid and check the sealing surface of the jar's mouth for tiny nicks. If necessary, change out the jar, add a new, properly prepared lid, and reprocess the food within 24 hours using the same processing time. Label food that has been re-canned and use this jar first.

Reprocessing is practical only when you have a large quantity of the same food and will be preparing another canner. If you decide not to reprocess, store the jar that did not seal in the refrigerator and use the contents within several days.

You should always test the jar seals before storing. After cooling jars for 12 to 24 hours, use one of the following methods to check the jar seals.

- Option 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.
- Option 2: Tap the lid with the bottom of a teaspoon. If it makes a dull sound, the lid is not sealed. If the food is in contact with the underside of the lid, it will also cause a dull sound. If the jar is sealed correctly, it will make a ringing, high-pitched sound.
- Option 3: Hold the jar at eye level and look across the lid. The lid should be concave (curved down slightly in the center). If center of the lid is either flat or bulging, it may not be sealed.

Storing Canned Foods

When your jars have passed the test, and you are sure the lids are tightly vacuum sealed, you can remove the screw bands. The bands may be reused many times after they are washed, dried and stored in a dry area. If left on the jars during storage, the bands may become difficult to remove or rust and become unusable.

Wash or wipe the sealed jars to remove any food residue from the canning process; then rinse and dry them. Label and date the jars and store them in a clean, cool, dark, dry place. Add a lot number, especially if you canned more than one canner full that day. Lot labeling is important in case one jar spoils, so that you can easily identify others from that canner load.

For the best quality, store the newly canned foods in a clean, cool, dark, dry place with a temperature between 50 and 70 °F. While many of us try to can as much as we are able or have available, remember it is recommended to use the food within a year.

Do not store jars above 95° F or near hot pipes, a range, a furnace, in an uninsulated attic, or in direct sunlight. Under these conditions, foods will lose quality in a few weeks or months and may spoil. Dampness may corrode the metal lids, break the seals, and allow contamination and spoilage.

Accidental freezing of canned foods will not cause spoilage unless the jars become unsealed and contaminated. However, freezing and thawing may soften the food. If the jars must be stored where they may freeze, wrap them in newspapers or place them in heavy cartons, and then cover them with more newspapers or blankets.

Before you use your stored home canned foods, inspect each selected jar carefully. Most importantly, do not taste food from a jar with an unsealed lid or food that shows signs of spoilage.

Check the lid for tightness and vacuum. A bulging lid is a sign of spoilage. Hold the jar upright at eye level and rotate it to examine its outside surface for streaks of dried food originating at the top of the jar which indicates it may have leaked. Look at the contents for rising air bubbles or unnatural color. When you open a jar, smell the contents to detect unnatural odors. Look for spurting liquid or any cotton-like mold growth (white, blue, black, or green) on the top food surface or underside of lid. Any jars that show signs of spoilage should not be used. Spoiled canned foods should be discarded in a place where they will not be eaten by humans or pets. Improperly canned low acid foods can contain the toxin that causes botulism without showing signs of spoilage. This is the reason we stress how important it is to precisely follow directions for canning. Check with your Extension office if you have questions.

Safe home food preservation will allow you to truly enjoy the fruits of your labors.

For detailed information about home food preservation, go to www.berkeleyextension.com and click on "links."

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