PRO CANNER'S QUICK-START GUIDE



JASON ADAMS

Pro Canner’s Quick Start Guide

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Introduction

Welcome to home canning, a handicraft that turns fresh ingredients into something lasting and worth savoring. If you've ever tasted homemade jam or opened a jar of summer tomatoes in the depths of winter, you've already experienced the magic it creates.



Canning isn't just about preserving food, either. It's about preserving moments in time. It lets you take something incredibly fleeting—those perfect peaches, those crisp cucumbers—and give them a longer life.

The History of Canning

The history of canning stretches back over 200 years, born out of necessity during Napoleon's time. The year was 1795 and French armies needed food that wouldn't spoil as they marched across Europe. Napoleon himself offered a reward of 12,000 francs for anyone who invented a new way to preserve food.

However, it wasn't until 1809 that such a method was invented. Nicolas Appert both won the reward and transformed food preservation forever.

A year later, Peter Durand created tin canisters (eventually becoming the cans we know today). The first American cannery opened in 1812. Canning jars finally entered the scene in 1858, invented by John L. Mason (and we still use his mason jars today). The Ball

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Introduction

You consider yourself a survivalist; a prepper ready for just about anything that the world could throw at you. You are ready for marauders who want your land, ready for natural disasters, political upheaval, plague, and perhaps a zombie or two… if the need should arise.

Are you truly ready though?

Have you thought about how you would create a sustainable food source for you and your group of survivors? Learning to garden and farm is important, but you also need to have a good protein source. One of the very best options available, and one of the easiest to start, is breeding chickens.

Keep in mind that this book is for survivalists, and is not intended for those who want to raise and breed show chickens. While there might be a few similarities here and there, they are decidedly different beasts.

Throughout the course of this book, we'll cover what you need to know to get started raising your chickens right now so you can be ready for the impending collapse. Even if the fall of civilization doesn't happen tomorrow or next week, you're still adding a valuable skill to your repertoire, and you will be able to save quite a bit of money on eggs and chicken!

Now, let's get on with the business of raising chickens.

Corporation (yes, that Ball Corporation) started manufacturing mason jars for home canning in 1884.

What began as a military solution quickly became a household art, passed down through generations. Today, canning feels like a radical act of self-reliance in a world of fast food and endless convenience.

Why Canning Is So Relevant Today

So, why take up canning now? For one, it gives you control—over ingredients, over costs, and over the quality of what you're feeding yourself and your family. As we understand more about the dangers presented by ultra-processed foods and how some of the chemicals used in the food manufacturing process affect our bodies and brains, that's more important than ever.

Canning is also a way to make your pantry more sustainable. It helps you cut down on food waste and avoid unnecessary packaging that'll just end up in the landfill. And let's not forget the health benefits: when you can your own food, you skip the preservatives, dyes, and hidden sugars. You get to decide what's in that jar.

Ultimately, home canning is probably more relevant today than ever before. Whether you're looking for a way to supplement what you buy from the store, preserve what your garden produces, or avoid potentially dangerous chemicals and additives, canning is the solution.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is designed for beginners. We created it for folks who know their way around a kitchen but might feel unsure about diving into canning. Maybe you've heard it's

complicated, or maybe you're worried about doing it wrong. Don't worry. This book is here to make things simple.

We'll skip the jargon, focus on the basics, and get you started with confidence.

By the time you're finished, you'll have the skills to can safely and efficiently, along with some go-to recipes to stock your shelves. You won't need fancy equipment or hours of free time, either. You'll just need a willingness to learn and a little curiosity.

So, let's get started. Home canning is more than a skill; it's a way of thinking about food, about time, and about what you value. With this guide in hand, you're about to take your first step into a world of fresh flavors, preserved memories, and jars that tell your story.

Chapter 1

Canning 101 – The Basics



New to canning? The whole process might feel like stepping into uncharted territory. Don't worry, you don't need to be a scientist or a chef to get started. At its core, canning is simple. It's just the process of preserving food by sealing it in a jar and keeping it safe to eat for months or even years. This chapter will break down the basics so you can jump in with confidence.

What Is Canning?

Canning is a method of food preservation that uses heat to kill bacteria, yeasts, and molds while sealing food in an airtight container. By removing the oxygen and creating a vacuum, you're creating an environment where harmful microbes can't grow. The result? Food that's shelf-stable, flavorful, and ready whenever you are.

It's more than just a way to keep food from spoiling, too. It's a connection to an older way of life. Canning lets you eat tomatoes in January or enjoy peach jam made with fruit you harvested back during the previous summer.

You're not just preserving food. You're preserving the time and care that went into growing, picking, and preparing it.

The Science Behind Preservation

Not sure what the process is behind canning? Again, it's not rocket science, but there are a few things that you'll need to know before getting started.

Here's how it works: when food and water are heated in a sealed jar, the heat destroys harmful microorganisms and enzymes that cause spoilage. As the jar cools, the air inside contracts. That pulls the lid tight against the jar's mouth, forming a vacuum seal. That keeps out new bacteria and keeps the food fresh.

There are two main enemies of safe canning: bacteria and improper sealing. The most infamous is Clostridium botulinum, which can produce a toxin in low-acid foods if they're not processed correctly. You're probably familiar with the condition it causes, which is botulism.

Don't let that scare you, though. It's completely preventable if you follow the right methods. However, it's a good example of why safe canning practices are important, as well as using the right equipment and high-quality jars, lids, and bands.

Types of Canning

There are two main methods of canning, and the one you choose depends on the type of food you're preserving. They're not interchangeable and canning the wrong food with the wrong method can be dangerous.

Water Bath Canning

This method is for high-acid foods. Think fruits, jams, jellies, pickles, and tomatoes (if you add lemon juice or vinegar). It's straightforward and you'll only need a large pot with a rack. The heat from boiling water is enough to safely preserve these foods.

Pressure Canning

For low-acid foods like vegetables, meats, soups, and stews, you'll need a pressure canner. This method uses high pressure to raise the temperature inside the canner above boiling, killing bacteria that can survive lower temperatures. It's required for foods with a pH above 4.6.

Pressure canning can seem pretty daunting. That's thanks in large part to horror stories from people who used their canners incorrectly, as well as low-end manufacturers making low-quality products. If you're interested in pressure canning but worried that your canner might explode, here are some simple safety tips:

- Read, understand, and always follow your canner's instruction manual. All of them come with a book of instructions.
- Don't deviate from the manufacturer's process.
- Don't overload your canner.
- Don't run the canner dry (boil out the water inside the vessel).

If you follow those tips and the manufacturer's instructions, you'll be canning safely in no time.

Essential Equipment

Canning doesn't require a lot of fancy gadgets (but it does require some equipment), but having the right tools makes the process smoother. Here's what you'll need to get started:



- Jars: Glass mason jars are the gold standard for canning. Ball is the market leader, but there are other options out there. You'll find a wide range of sizes and shapes, too. Choose the right size for your recipe, and make sure they're designed for canning, not storage, because there is a difference.

- Lids and Bands: Canning jars use flat lids and metal bands to seal food inside. The lid covers the jar's mouth and suctions down during processing, while the band is responsible for holding the lid in place during the canning process and after you open the jar later. Lids are single-use, but bands can be reused as long as they're in good condition. Watch for rust and corrosion build-up over time on your bands.

- Canner: A water bath canner (a large pot with a rack for your jars) for high-acid foods or a pressure canner for low-acid foods. The most basic options are called "granite ware", which is ceramic-coated steel. Note that they're usable with glass-top stoves, so if you have one of those, you'll need a stainless steel or aluminum version. Most canners also come with a jar rack and a lid.

- Funnel: A wide-mouth funnel helps you fill jars without spills. Make sure the funnel you get fits the mouth diameter of your jars (there are standard-width jars and wide-width jars). It's definitely better than trying to load your jars by the individual spoonful.

- Jar Lifter: This essential tool makes it safe and easy to lift hot jars in and out of the canner. Jar lifters look like strangely shaped tongs. The rubber-coated ends go around the jar.

- Bubble Remover/Headspace Tool: Used to remove trapped air bubbles and measure the space at the top of the jar. Too much headspace means there's a lot of air in the jar, and that can prevent it from sealing properly.

- Pressure Canner: If you'll be canning low-acid foods, you'll need a pressure canner. Presto is the most popular (and affordable) brand on the market, but there are plenty of other options out there.

  Do yourself a favor and invest in a decent model. Also, make sure that you get one large enough for the batches you want to process. Pressure canning takes time, and a larger canner can save you tons of it over trying to can multiple small batches.

Jams, Jellies, and Preserves: Equipment You'll Need

We've touched on the equipment you'll need for basic canning. However, if you plan to get into making jams, jellies, or preserves using whole fruit, you'll need some additional equipment. Here's the breakdown:

All the Equipment Already Mentioned

You'll need all the equipment we've already covered (jars, bands, lids, pressure canner, jar handler, etc.). Make sure you have a good funnel here and consider using wide-mouthed jars rather than standard ones.

You'll likely be canning pints rather than quarts, too. A little jelly or jam goes a long way, and you don't want your food to go bad before you've gotten through an entire quart. Ball and other manufacturers offer a wide range of sizes and even designs for jelly jars.

Jelly-Specific Equipment

If you're making jelly or jam from whole fruit, you'll need a way to break everything down. A few pieces of equipment will come in very handy here:

1. Food Processor: A good food processor will be your best friend. However, it's not the best tool for all jobs.

2. Strainer and Stand: Part of the job of making jams and jellies is to separate the pulp from the juice. A strainer helps you do that. You'll find metal strainers that work well, as well as cloth/mesh strainers and strainer bags. Pair those with a stand for the best results. If you're using a metal strainer, you'll need a pestle to help you mash the fruit pulp and release juices.

3. Stainless Steel Food Mill: A food mill is something like a manual food processor, but it's purpose-built for handling sliced fruit like apples and peaches. Hold the handle with one hand and turn the knob with the other and you'll easily mill fruit into juice while keeping (most) of the pulp out of it.

4. Long-Handled Spoon and a Good Pot: Jellies and jams need to be cooked before they're canned. For that, you'll need a good pot, but don't neglect your stirring implement. Wood spoons (long-handled models) are good options.

Skip using your standard kitchen implements, though. The fruit will likely stain whatever you put in it, plus if there are off flavors from cooking, you may transfer those to your jelly.

Safety First

If there's one thing to take seriously in canning, it's safety. Using incorrect techniques can lead to wasted food, broken glass, or even foodborne illness. Luckily, following a few key practices will keep your jars, and your family, safe.

- Use Tested Recipes: Stick to trusted sources like this guide, the USDA, or the Ball Blue Book. These recipes have been tested for safety. That doesn't mean you can't experiment, but nail the basics first, build familiarity with safe food processing, and then slowly get creative.

- Don't Skip Steps: Skipping steps, like processing jars for the full recommended time, can compromise the safety of your food. Remember that these times are calculated to kill bacteria that will spoil your food, but that can also make you and your family very sick.

- Inspect Jars and Lids: Always check jars for cracks and lids for dents and corrosion. A compromised seal can lead to infected food. Don't reuse your lids, even though it's tempting to do so.

- Cleanliness Is Key: Start with clean jars, tools, and hands. Wash your produce thoroughly to remove dirt and bacteria. If you put clean food into clean jars with clean hands, you'll be at a much lower risk for bacterial infection.

Canning isn't just a skill. It's a tradition that connects you to the seasons, to your food, and to a community of people who value homemade, homegrown, and handcrafted. Now that you're familiar with the basics, it's time to dig a bit deeper. In the next chapter, we'll discuss how to prep for canning success.

Chapter 2

Preparing for Success



Canning is like any good recipe in that your final product is only as good as the ingredients and preparation that go into it. Bake a cake with flour that's past its prime, and you'll know it. The same is true if you try to can limp, lifeless green beans.

Before you heat up your first jar, you'll want to make sure you're ready by choosing the right ingredients, preparing them properly, and creating a workspace that supports the entire process from beginning to end.

Not sure what that might entail? Don't worry. This chapter covers everything from selecting your ingredients to how to create a streamlined workspace.

Choosing Ingredients

When it comes to canning, the golden rule is simple: start with the best. Fresh, high-quality ingredients are the backbone of great canned food. You can't turn overripe, wilted produce into something magical just because you put it in a jar. But what does "quality" really mean here?

Freshness Matters

Whether you're picking strawberries from your garden or buying green beans at the farmers' market, the fresher, the better. Fruits and vegetables lose flavor and nutrients as they age, so try to can as close to harvest as possible.

Obviously, fresh-picked food from your backyard garden will be best, but farmers markets and even roadside stands can also be good. Grocery stores are hit-or-miss but feel free to check out the produce section for likely candidates.

Consider Seasonality

Canning works best when you follow the rhythms of the seasons (eating seasonally is also better for you and the planet). Summer is a great time for canning things like tomatoes, peaches, and berries, while fall brings an abundance of apples and root vegetables. Seasonal produce is usually cheaper, fresher, and more flavorful, which makes it perfect for preserving.

Note that if you're not growing your own, try to buy from local farmers and gardeners for true seasonality. Grocery stores import much of their produce from other countries so that consumers can have popular items all year long.

Choose the Right Varieties

Not all fruits and vegetables are created equal when it comes to canning. For example, some tomato varieties are meatier and less watery, making them better for sauces. The same is true when it comes to pickling cucumbers. Some varieties are great for canning, while others are better for slicing and eating fresh.

And it doesn't stop with canning in general. What you're canning also matters. Canning homemade spaghetti sauce? You may need a different variety than if you were doing diced

tomatoes. When in doubt, ask a local farmer or do a quick search to find the best canning varieties for your recipe.

Pre-Canning Prep

Once you've gathered your ingredients, it's time to roll up your sleeves and get everything ready for the jar. This process might seem tedious, but it's important for safety and quality.

Washing

Start by washing all your produce thoroughly, even if it looks clean. Dirt and bacteria can hide in crevices, so rinse fruits and vegetables under running water and scrub them gently with a brush if necessary.

Peeling and Chopping

Some recipes call for peeling fruits and vegetables, especially if the skins are tough or bitter. For example, peaches and tomatoes often need their skins removed before canning. A quick blanch in boiling water followed by an ice bath makes peeling easy.

Blanching

Blanching is a quick dip in boiling water followed by an immediate transfer to ice water. This process stops enzymes that can cause spoilage, helps preserve color and texture, and makes peeling easier. It's especially useful for vegetables like green beans and carrots.

Measuring and Prepping

Once your produce is washed, peeled, and chopped, measure out the amounts your recipe calls for. Prepping everything in advance keeps your workflow smooth and prevents mistakes later.

Setting Up Your Workspace

Canning requires a bit of space and good organization, but you don't need a sprawling kitchen to make it work. What you do need is a clean, well-organized setup that lets you focus.



Cleanliness Is Non-Negotiable

Before you start, clean your countertops, tools, and equipment. Wipe down surfaces with a mild disinfectant, wash your hands well, and make sure your jars and utensils are freshly cleaned and sterilized.

Gather Your Tools

Lay out everything you'll need, from jars and lids to canners and utensils. Having your tools within arm's reach saves you from scrambling mid-process.

Organize Your Workflow

Arrange your workspace in stations: set aside an area for prepping produce, another for filling jars, and a spot for processing. Keep hot pads and towels nearby for handling hot jars. The more organized your space and accessible your tools and equipment, the easier everything will be.

Plan for Cleanup

Canning can get messy, especially when you're working with juicy fruits or sticky syrups. Keep a damp cloth or sponge handy to wipe up spills as you go and set aside space for dirty tools and empty bowls. And plan for cleanup afterward.

Preparing for canning is like warming up before a run. It sets the tone for everything that comes next. By choosing the best ingredients, prepping them properly, and creating a clean, organized workspace, you're setting yourself up for success. In the next chapter, we'll walk through water bath canning and pressure canning, as well as some troubleshooting for common issues.

Chapter 3

The Step-by-Step Canning Process



By this point, you've got your ingredients prepped and your workspace ready. Now comes the heart of the matter: the process itself. Whether you're making a batch of strawberry jam, pickling cucumbers, or preserving green beans, the method you use will depend on the type of food you're canning.

This chapter walks you through both water bath and pressure canning, step by step, and helps you troubleshoot any hiccups along the way. However, don't forget: if you're using a pressure canner, always refer to the manufacturer's instructions on use. Nothing else should supersede those.

This chapter's broken down into three primary sections – water bath canning, pressure canning, and troubleshooting. Depending on the process you're following, you may not need to read all three.

Water Bath Canning

Water bath canning is the simplest method and a great place to start if you're new to all this. It's good for high-acid foods like fruits, jams, jellies, and pickles, but if you're going the low-acid route, skip this section and move on to the one on pressure canning. Water bath

canning is not recommended for low-acid foods, no matter what you might have read on social media or what your coworker's friend's mother does every year.

Step-by-Step Guide

Follow the steps below for a simple, hassle-free process.

Prep Your Equipment

You don't necessarily need to sanitize your jars. If you'll be using a water bath for 10 minutes or more, clean equipment is all you need. If you're processing for less than 10 minutes, you'll need to sanitize everything.

You can run the jars through the dishwasher on the sanitize cycle (if applicable) or submerge them in simmering water for 10 minutes. Keep the jars warm until you're ready to fill them. The goal here is to kill the bacteria on the surface of your equipment.

Prepare Your Recipe

Follow your recipe to the letter. Whether you're making jam or brining pickles, this is not the time to experiment. Tested recipes ensure safety and a successful seal. Don't experiment if you're not an experienced canner and don't follow recipes that aren't tested. If you don't already have a few, you'll find several included in the next chapter.

Fill the Jars

Use your funnel to fill each jar. Make sure to leave the appropriate headspace (usually 1/4 inch for jams and jellies, 1/2 inch for pickles or fruit). Headspace helps make sure a vacuum forms during the canning process.

Remove Air Bubbles

Use a bubble remover or a non-metallic spatula to release trapped air. Insert the tool along the inside edge of the jar and gently move it around. Air gets trapped between layers of filling and, when released during canning, can break the vacuum seal.

Wipe the Rims

Clean the jar rims with a damp paper towel to remove any food particles or syrup. A clean rim helps you create a good seal. If particles are trapped between the lid and the jar, they can cause leaks.

Apply Lids and Bands

Place the flat lid on top, then screw on the band just until it’s fingertip tight. Don’t overtighten—air needs to escape during processing.

Process the Jars

Place the jars in the canner. Make sure they’re fully submerged with at least an inch of water above them. Bring the water to a rolling boil and process for the time specified in your recipe.

Cool and Check the Seal

Carefully remove the jars using a jar lifter and set them on a towel-lined countertop. Let them cool for 12-24 hours. Check the seals by pressing the center of each lid. The center shouldn't flex. The bump in the lid should be slightly inverted. If it's not, it means that the jar probably isn't sealed.

Pressure Canning



For low-acid foods like vegetables, meats, and soups, water bath canning isn't enough. You'll need a pressure canner, which raises the temperature above boiling to kill bacteria like Clostridium botulinum.

Step-by-Step Guide

Pressure canning doesn't have to be daunting. Follow these simple steps.

Inspect Your Canner

Check your pressure canner for cracks or damage, and make sure the vent pipe is clear. Double-check that the gasket is clean and in good condition (no cracks, dry rot, etc.). Assemble all parts and familiarize yourself with the instructions for your specific model. It's been said before, but here it is again: follow your manufacturer's instructions.

Prepare the Jars and Lids

Get your jars, lids, and bands ready. While you don't need to sanitize any of them, you do need to make sure that they're clean and free of debris. A quick run through the dishwasher or a solid handwashing will help.

Prepare Your Recipe

Follow a tested pressure canning recipe. Don't guess when it comes to processing times. They're based on science and help keep your food safe. Trying to cut corners or get creative when you're not 100% sure of the results can have dangerous consequences.

Fill the Jars

Use a funnel and ladle the food into the jars, leaving the recommended amount of headspace. Remove bubbles and clean the rims before installing the lids and bands.

Load the Canner

Place the jars on the rack inside the pressure canner so that they're not touching. Your jars will move a good bit during the process, and they can crack or even shatter if they touch. Add water as directed by your canner's instructions.

Seal and Heat

Lock the lid in place and heat the canner. Let the steam escape for 10 minutes before adding the pressure regulator to make sure the interior's up to temp.

Process Under Pressure

Bring the canner to the recommended pressure (e.g., 10 PSI for most recipes at sea level) and start timing once pressure is reached. If you're located higher than 1,000 feet in elevation, increase that to 15 PSI.

Note that dial gauge canners use 11 lbs. of pressure from 1,001 and 2,000 feet, and 12 lbs. of pressure from 2,001 to 4,000 feet. From 4,001 to 6,000 feet, you'll use 13 lbs. of pressure, and you'll need to bump that to 14 lbs. of pressure for altitudes of 6,001 to 8,000 feet. Adjust the heat to maintain steady pressure throughout the processing time your recipe dictates.

Cool Safely

Turn off the heat and let the pressure drop naturally. Don't try to speed it up. This takes time. Once the canner is depressurized, carefully remove the lid and remove the jars with a jar lifter. Let them cool undisturbed.

Troubleshooting Common Problems

Even with careful preparation, things don't always go perfectly. Here's how to handle the most common canning hiccups.

If Jars Don't Seal

Check for food on the rim or a bent lid. If the seal fails within 24 hours, you can reprocess the jars with new lids or refrigerate and use the food within a few days. Other reasons your

jars might not seal include not leaving enough headspace, not removing air trapped in the jar, or not processing your jars for enough time.

If Food Discolors

Slight discoloration, especially at the top of the jar, is normal and doesn't affect safety. However, large-scale browning or odd smells could mean spoilage. If it smells bad, it probably is bad. When in doubt, throw it out.

If Jars Break During Processing

This usually happens if your jars weren't warm enough when placed in hot water or if they had small cracks. Always inspect jars before use and warm them gradually.

Canning isn't just about putting food in jars. It's about mastering a skill that's been passed down for almost two centuries With these methods, you're ready to preserve the flavors of your harvest, one jar at a time. Of course, that means you need to follow the right recipe. We've got you covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Canning Recipes for Beginners



Now that you've mastered the basics, it's time to roll up your sleeves and start canning. This chapter is packed with beginner-friendly recipes, so you can start with simple jams and work your way up to savory staples and more advanced options.

The beauty of canning is that every jar is a little time capsule, capturing the flavors of the season and the care you've put into preserving them. In addition to the recipes included here, you'll find links to additional resources at the end of the chapter.

Sweet Preserves

There's nothing like homemade jam or jelly to spread on toast or dollop on pancakes. Sweet preserves are an excellent starting point because they're simple, forgiving, and endlessly satisfying.

Classic Strawberry Jam

Yield: 6 half-pint jars

Ingredients:

- 5 cups fresh strawberries, hulled and mashed
- 7 cups granulated sugar
- 1 packet (1.75 oz) powdered pectin
- 1/4 cup lemon juice

Instructions:

- Combine strawberries, pectin, and lemon juice in a large pot. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly.

- Add sugar all at once and return to a full rolling boil. Boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly.

- Remove from heat and skim off any foam. Ladle the hot jam into sterilized jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace.

- Wipe rims, apply lids, and process in a water bath canner for 10 minutes.

Simple Grape Jelly

Yield: 6 half-pint jars

Ingredients:

- 4 cups grape juice (homemade or store-bought)
- 7 cups granulated sugar
- 1 packet (1.75 oz) powdered pectin

Instructions:

- Combine grape juice and pectin in a large pot. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly.
- Add sugar and return to a full boil. Boil for 1 minute, stirring constantly.
- Skim foam, then ladle into sterilized jars. Leave 1/4-inch headspace, wipe rims, and process in a water bath canner for 10 minutes.

Savory Staples

Savory canned goods, like tomato sauce and pickles, are pantry powerhouses. They're versatile and delicious and save you time in the kitchen when life gets busy.

Homemade Tomato Sauce

Yield: 4 quart jars

Ingredients:

- 20 ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 tsp dried basil or oregano (optional)

Instructions:

- In a large pot, sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until softened. Add tomatoes, salt, and herbs if using.

- Simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Blend the sauce to your desired consistency.

- Ladle into sterilized jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Process in a water bath canner for 40 minutes.

Crunchy Dill Pickles

Yield: 6 pint jars

Ingredients:

- 4 lbs. pickling cucumbers, washed and trimmed
- 6 cups water
- 2 cups white vinegar
- 1/4 cup pickling salt
- 6 fresh dill sprigs
- 6 garlic cloves

Instructions:

- Combine water, vinegar, and salt in a pot. Bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes.

- Pack cucumbers, dill, and garlic into sterilized jars. Pour brine over cucumbers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace.

- Process in a water bath canner for 15 minutes.

Canned Green Beans

Yield: 6 pint jars

Ingredients:

- 6 lbs. fresh green beans, washed and trimmed
- Water
- 1-1/2 tsp salt (optional)

Instructions:

- Pack green beans tightly into sterilized jars, leaving 1 inch headspace. Add 1/4 tsp salt per pint if desired.

- Fill jars with boiling water, leaving 1 inch headspace.

- Process in a pressure canner at 10 PSI for 20-25 minutes.

Advanced Options

Once you've gotten comfortable with the basics, you can move on to heartier and more complex recipes like soups, stews, and even meats. These require pressure canning, but don't let that intimidate you—the rewards are worth it.

Chicken Vegetable Soup

Yield: 4 quart jars

Ingredients:

- 4 cups cooked, shredded chicken
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 4 cups diced vegetables (carrots, celery, potatoes)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp dried thyme

Instructions:

- Combine all ingredients in a large pot and bring to a boil. Simmer for 10 minutes.
- Ladle hot soup into sterilized jars, leaving 1 inch headspace.
- Process in a pressure canner at 10 PSI for 90 minutes.

Beef Stew

Yield: 4 quart jars

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. cooked beef cubes
- 8 cups beef broth
- 4 cups diced potatoes
- 2 cups diced carrots
- 1 cup diced onions
- 1 tsp salt

Instructions:

- Combine all ingredients in a pot and simmer for 15 minutes.
- Ladle into jars, leaving 1 inch headspace.
- Process in a pressure canner at 10 PSI for 90 minutes.

Additional Resources: Expanding Your Canning Recipe Library

- Ball's Canning Recipe Collection
- Taste of Home's Canning Recipe Collection
- The National Center for Home Food Preservation (UGA)

By following these recipes, you'll have a pantry stocked with homemade preserves that taste as good as the day they were made. Whether you're spooning jam onto warm biscuits or heating up a jar of soup on a winter evening, you'll know the time you spent canning was well spent.

Chapter 5

Storage and Use: How to Store and Use Your Canned Foods



You've done the hard part, carefully filling and sealing jars full of fresh, flavorful food. But the work doesn't stop once your jars cool. You'll need to label and store your food. It's also important to know some creative uses for your canned goods to make sure your efforts don't go to waste.

This chapter will guide you through the final steps of your canning journey, from keeping an organized pantry to turning those preserved treasures into delicious meals. Don't worry, it's not as complicated as mastering a new recipe.

Labeling Your Jars

The first thing to do after your jars cool is label them. It might feel like an extra step, but you'll thank yourself later. Labels keep you organized and help you keep track of what you've made and when you made it.

What to Include

At a minimum, write the date and contents on each jar. For example, "Peach Jam - July 2025." If you're feeling ambitious, include batch notes, like whether you used a specific

variety of peaches or adjusted the sugar. Feel free to include as much or as little information as you need beyond the basics (food type and canning date).

How to Label

You can use dissolvable labels, permanent markers on the lid, or pre-printed stickers. Of all the options, marking the lid is the simplest. And since lids are one-time use, you don't have to worry that permanent marker can't be removed. If you decide to go the label or sticker route instead, here are a few best practices to keep in mind:

- Make sure the ink won't smudge. Inkjet printers are notorious for this.
- Make sure the adhesive is up to the task (some low-quality labels will peel off before you have a chance to eat your food).
- Make sure there's enough space on the label to neatly include all the important information you'll need.

Proper Storage

Canned goods are shelf-stable, but they're not indestructible. Where and how you store them can make all the difference in keeping your preserves fresh and safe. Knowing how to store your canned food will help keep it usable for longer and help you avoid clutter.

Cool, Dark, and Dry

Store jars in a pantry, basement, or cupboard away from direct sunlight, heat, or moisture. A temperature range of 50–70°F is good (you're safe up to about 95°F, though). Ideally, you'll

have a dedicated space where you can keep all your canned goods until you're ready to use them. Note that you do not need to refrigerate them. They'll keep just fine at room temperature for a surprisingly long time.

- Keep your canned food away from direct sunlight, because that will make it spoil faster.

- High heat (over 95°F) will degrade food quality quickly.

- Moisture can corrode lids and bands and make your labels illegible.

Inspect Jars Regularly

Check your jars periodically for signs of spoilage, like bulging lids, leaks, or an off smell when you open them. If you notice any of these, don't taste-test. Just discard the contents. Here are some signs to watch for that your food should be tossed instead of eaten:

- The lid is bulging, or you notice leakage under the lid/band.
- The food smells bad after you open the jar.
- The food has visible mold on it.
- The food is discolored (more than just a little near the jar's mouth).
- The container spurts foam or liquid gushes out when you open the jar.
- You notice bubbling in the jar (fermentation).
- You can see that the food is separating in the jar.

If you spot a problem, open the jar to check. If it's bad, throw it away. If you suspect it's bad, get rid of it.

Shelf Life

Properly canned goods typically last one to two years, but they're best enjoyed within the first year for maximum flavor and quality. Write an "open by" date on each label to keep track. And it's important to understand the difference between "safe" and "good".

Home canned foods are safe indefinitely. Bacteria won't develop as long as the seal holds. So, you could technically have "safe" food after five years on the shelf. Good is another story.

Over time, canned food begins to break down naturally. It loses nutrition, changes texture, and the flavor declines, too. So, while that five-year-old jar of green beans is probably safe to eat, chances are good that you're not going to enjoy it.

Creative Ways to Use Your Canned Goods

What's the point of canning if your jars just sit on the shelf? Using your preserved food is where the real joy happens. Whether it's a last-minute dinner or a holiday treat, your canned goods bring convenience and flavor to the table.

Sweet Ideas

If you've canned fruit, jelly, jam, or preserves, there's a world of options open to you for use all year long. Here are just a few examples:

- Jam Glaze: Warm a spoonful of jam and drizzle it over roasted chicken, pork, or baked brie.

- Fruit Fillings: Use your canned peaches, cherries, or apples in pies, cobblers, or crisps.

- Homemade Yogurt Toppers: Spoon a dollop of jam or preserved fruit onto plain yogurt for a quick and healthy breakfast.

Savory Staples

From tomatoes to green beans, there's a ton of choices available when it comes to more savory preserved food:

- Quick Pasta Sauce: Open a jar of tomato sauce, heat it with garlic and olive oil, and toss with spaghetti. Add a sprinkle of parmesan and fresh basil for an easy meal.

- Pickle Perfection: Chop your dill pickles into tuna or potato salad for extra crunch and flavor. Serve them whole alongside sandwiches or burgers.

- Veggie Side Dish: Heat up canned green beans with a pat of butter, salt, and pepper for a simple, no-fuss side.

Advanced Creations

Want to do more than the basics? Here are a few more advanced options that you can make with your canned food (and you can probably think of many others):

- Soups and Stews: Open a jar of canned beef stew or chicken soup, heat it on the stove, and pair it with crusty bread for a comforting meal.

- Flatbreads and Pizzas: Spread your tomato sauce over a flatbread or pizza crust, top with cheese and veggies, and bake until bubbly.

- Marinades and Dressings: Blend preserved fruits like peaches or cherries into vinaigrettes or marinades for a sweet-savory twist.

Your pantry of homemade canned goods is more than a storage space—it's a toolkit for delicious meals and snacks. Whether you're making breakfast for two or hosting a dinner party, those jars are your secret weapon. With proper labeling, smart storage, and a little culinary creativity, your hard work will pay off every time you twist open a lid.

Chapter 6

Troubleshooting and FAQs



We've touched on troubleshooting throughout this book. However, it really warrants a deeper dive. In this chapter, we'll help you troubleshoot some of the most common issues and answer the frequently asked questions many home canners have when getting started (and even beyond that).

Common Canning Challenges

Jars Didn't Seal

You've followed the recipe, but your jars didn't seal. It's frustrating, but it's not the end of the world.

Why It Happens:

- Improper headspace (too much or too little).
- Food or residue on the jar rims.
- Lids weren't properly positioned or tightened.
- Faulty lids or bands.

What to Do:

- Remove the lids, clean the rims thoroughly, and try again with new lids. Reprocess the jars within 24 hours using the same canning method.

- Alternatively, refrigerate the contents and use them within a week.

Food Discoloration

Your beautiful jams or pickles now look dull, or there's an odd color creeping in.

Why It Happens:

- Oxidation from improper sealing or air left in the jars.
- Overprocessing or exposure to high heat.
- Using reactive cookware like aluminum or cast iron.

What to Do:

- If the jars are sealed and the discoloration is minor, the food is still safe to eat.
- For more severe discoloration, especially if accompanied by off smells, discard it.

Jam or Jelly Didn't Set

You made jam, but it's more like syrup. Or your jelly didn't gel at all.

Why It Happens:

- Inaccurate measurements of sugar, acid, or pectin.
- Cooking the mixture at the wrong temperature or for too short a time.

- Overripe or underripe fruit lacking sufficient natural pectin.

What to Do:

- Let it sit for a few days. Sometimes jams thicken as they cool and settle.

- If it still doesn't set, reprocess by adding more pectin, lemon juice, or sugar and bringing it back to the gel point (220°F).

Cloudy Liquid in Canned Vegetables or Pickles

Your clear brine is now cloudy, and you're wondering if something went wrong.

Why It Happens:

- Starch released from vegetables like potatoes or beans.
- Using table salt instead of canning or kosher salt.
- Natural fermentation in pickles (if unintentional, it's a problem).

What to Do:

- If the jars are sealed and there's no sign of spoilage, the food is likely safe to eat, but it may not taste as expected.

- For fermented flavors, discard the batch and start fresh.

Liquid Loss During Processing

Your jars are sealed, but some liquid has boiled out, leaving the contents partially exposed.

Why It Happens:

- Jars weren't covered with enough water during processing.
- Processing at too high a temperature or for too long.
- Improper headspace allowing siphoning.

What to Do:

- If the jars sealed properly, the food is safe but might dry out over time. Use those jars first.

Beginner FAQs

1. Can I Reuse Lids?

No. Lids are designed for a single use for a solid seal. Reusing lids increases the risk of failure. However, screw bands can be reused if they're not bent or rusty.

2. Can I Adjust Recipes?

Adjusting the sugar or spice level is fine for flavor, but don't change the proportions of acid, liquid, or vegetables in tested recipes. Altering these can compromise safety, especially in low-acid foods.

3. How Do I Adjust for Altitude?

Water boils at lower temperatures at higher altitudes, so you'll need to increase your processing time:

- For every 1,000 feet above sea level, add 5 minutes to water bath canning.
- For pressure canning, adjust the pressure level according to your altitude (following your manufacturer's instructions).

4. Do I Need a Pressure Canner?

For low-acid foods like vegetables, meat, or soups, yes. Pressure canning makes sure temperatures are high enough to destroy harmful bacteria.

5. What's the Best Way to Sterilize Jars?

If you're processing jars for 10 minutes or more, sterilization isn't necessary. Washing with hot, soapy water is enough. For shorter processing times, boil the jars for 10 minutes before filling or run them through your dishwasher with the high-temp dry setting turned on.

Mistakes are part of the learning curve and even experienced canners run into hurdles from time to time. The important thing is to stay alert when it comes to safety and use each batch to refine your skills. Soon enough, you'll tackle problems confidently and know that the occasional hiccup is just part of the process.

Chapter 7

Canning Beyond the Basics



When you think of home canning, chances are good you picture jars of green beans or maybe homemade tomato sauce. It might be fresh-picked okra or maybe sweet corn grown in your backyard. Those are all amazing ways to extend your harvest, but there's more possible.

Beyond traditional canning, there's a world of techniques that complement and expand your preserving toolkit. This chapter dives into three different areas: fermentation, pairing canning with dehydrated foods, and canning without commercial pectin. Each offers new flavors, textures, and ways to do more with your produce.

Fermentation and Pickling

Fermentation is one of the oldest and most versatile food preservation methods. It uses naturally occurring bacteria and yeast to transform foods, creating rich, tangy flavors and lengthening shelf life.

Why Ferment?

- You can add complex flavors to your pantry, like those in kimchi, sauerkraut, and sour pickles.

- Fermentation increases the nutritional value of your food by introducing probiotics.

- It requires minimal equipment and no heat, making it energy-efficient, and less expensive to get started than conventional canning.

Fermentation as a Companion to Canning

While canning stops bacterial activity to preserve food, fermentation relies on controlled bacterial growth. We're talking about lactobacillus, which produces lactic acid. That's what gives fermented food its delightful sour twang, as well as its gut-positive benefits.

You can combine canning and fermentation if you want, but it's not really recommended. Heat canning (boiling water bath and pressure canning) will kill the bacteria in your ferments, ending any benefits from probiotics and altering the taste and flavor of your food.

However, fermented foods can be kept in a cool, dark place for a surprisingly long time, supplementing your conventionally canned foods. With that said, the best place to store your ferments is the refrigerator. If they're stored in warm areas, the fermentation will continue, and the food may ultimately get too sour for you.

Getting Started with Fermentation

Essential Tools: Wide-mouth jars, fermentation weights, and airlock lids.

Basic Ingredients: Fresh vegetables (almost any veggie can be fermented), non-iodized salt, and clean water.

The Process:

- Prepare your vegetables by slicing or shredding them.
- Create a brine with water and salt.
- Submerge the vegetables fully to prevent spoilage.
- Cover the jar add, an airlock (or leave the lid loose), and let it sit at room temperature for one to three weeks, depending on the recipe.

Resources

Interested in diving deeper into fermentation and its many benefits? You'll find plenty of additional information here:

- National Center for Home Food Preservation
- USDA Safely Fermenting Food at Home

Dehydrated Additions



Dehydrating food is another time-tested preservation method. Combining it with canning lets you extend the versatility of your pantry. Plus, it's surprisingly simple to do.

Dried fruits, vegetables, and herbs can enhance your canned recipes or stand alone as preserved staples. Plus, dried foods don't take up as much space, and you don't need to worry about things like the fermentation process carrying on if you don't store your food in the fridge.

Why Pair Canning and Dehydration?

- Saves space: Dehydrated foods take up less room than fresh or canned versions. Think of dried beans – they take up much less room than canned beans.

- Concentrates flavor: Dried ingredients add an intense punch to recipes. Think of dried herbs – you use far less dried basil or rosemary than you would if it were fresh.

- Reduces waste: Dry leftover produce to use in soups, sauces, or snacks. This not only helps you extend your harvest but lets you use even things you might have otherwise discarded.

Ideas for Pairing Dehydrated Foods with Canning

- Fruit Leather and Jams: Dehydrate fruit for homemade fruit leather or incorporate dried pieces into jam for texture.

- Sun-Dried Tomatoes: Can these flavorful gems in olive oil for a ready-to-use topping or ingredient in a wide range of dishes.

- Herbs and Spices: Use dried herbs in canned sauces or pickles for a more potent flavor.

How to Dehydrate Foods

Tools: Food dehydrator, oven, or even a sunny windowsill.

Basic Steps:

- Wash and slice food evenly for consistent drying.
- Arrange pieces on drying trays, leaving space for air circulation.
- Dry at 125°F–135°F (for most fruits and vegetables) until pliable but not sticky.

Canning Without Commercial Pectin

Pectin is the natural thickening agent that gives jams and jellies their signature texture. While commercial pectin simplifies the process, you can achieve the same thing using natural sources like apple cores, citrus peels, or quince.

Why Go Pectin-Free?

- It gives you greater control over texture and flavor.
- It reduces your reliance on store-bought ingredients.
- It makes use of scraps that would otherwise go to waste.

Natural Sources of Pectin

- Apples: Especially green apples and their cores.
- Citrus: Rinds, seeds, and membranes are rich in pectin.
- Quince: This fruit is naturally high in pectin and adds a floral note to preserves.

Making Your Own Pectin

- Save apple peels and cores or citrus seeds.
- Cover the scraps with water and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes.
- Use a fine mesh sieve or cheesecloth to remove solids.
- Mix a spoonful of the liquid with rubbing alcohol (not for consumption). If it forms a gel-like clump, your pectin is ready.
- Refrigerate your pectin for up to a week or freeze it for longer storage.

Tips for Canning Without Commercial Pectin

- Use a longer cooking time to allow natural pectin to activate.
- Include a high-pectin fruit like apples or citrus in low-pectin recipes.
- Be patient. Achieving the perfect gel without commercial pectin may require trial and error.

Exploring fermentation, dehydration, and natural pectin-making takes your preservation skills to the next level. These methods not only deepen your connection to the food you preserve but also encourage creativity and resourcefulness. Whether you're fermenting spicy kimchi, drying late-summer tomatoes, or making a pectin-free marmalade, these techniques help you build a pantry that's both sustainable and delicious.

Chapter 8

Small-Batch Canning for Busy Schedules



Pressed for time? Juggling planting, maintaining, and harvesting with a day job or other responsibilities? Worried that canning will take too much time? It can be time-consuming, certainly. However, there are ways to can your own produce even if you have a non-stop schedule.

Why Small Batches Work

Small-batch canning is more than just a scaled-down version of traditional canning. It's a practical, flexible way to preserve food even if you have almost no time for canning. Canning in small batches is also a great option for those with limited growing space, like a container garden, and gives you a way to store away even smaller amounts of produce.

Less Time, More Convenience

A small batch can often be completed in under an hour, making it fit easily into weeknights or busy weekends. Plus, there's less chopping, measuring, and processing involved, so you can fit it into your schedule without much fuss.

Perfect for Small Spaces

If you live in an apartment or have limited counter space, small-batch canning requires minimal equipment and room to operate. You can process one or two jars in a regular stockpot and there's no need for a giant canner.

Fewer Ingredients

Small batches make sense when you have a small amount of fruit or vegetables, like a pint of strawberries that are almost too ripe or a handful of cucumbers from a backyard garden. This method reduces food waste, turning what might otherwise go bad into something delicious and long-lasting.

Quick Recipes for Small Batches

Small-batch canning is all about simplicity and adaptability. Here are a couple of ideas to get you started.

Single-Batch Marmalade

Marmalade is a great small-batch project because it requires only a few ingredients, and you can make it with just a couple of oranges or other citrus fruits.

Ingredients: 2 medium oranges, 1 lemon, 2 cups sugar, 1 cup water.

Steps:

- Wash and slice the oranges and lemon thinly, removing the seeds.

- Combine the fruit, water, and sugar in a small saucepan. Simmer until the mixture reaches the gel point (20–30 minutes).

- Pour into a single sterilized jar and process in a water bath for 10 minutes or refrigerate if you'll use it quickly.

Refrigerator Pickles

When you don't have time to process jars in a canner, refrigerator pickles are a quick and satisfying option.

Ingredients: 1–2 cucumbers, 1 cup vinegar, 1/2 cup water, 1 tablespoon salt, 1 tablespoon sugar, garlic, dill, and spices to taste.

Steps:

- Slice cucumbers into rounds or spears.

- Heat the vinegar, water, salt, and sugar in a small pot until dissolved.

- Pack cucumbers and seasonings into a jar, pour the brine over, and refrigerate. These are ready in 24 hours and stay fresh for a week.

Small Batches, Big Payoff

The beauty of small-batch canning is its versatility. Whether you're preserving seasonal fruit or experimenting with new recipes, you can dive in without much preparation. Plus,

these tiny projects let you test recipes before committing to larger quantities, helping to make sure every jar is something you'll love.

Conclusion



Canning as a Lifestyle

Canning isn't just about preserving food. It's about preserving a way of life. It connects us to the seasons, teaches us to savor the work of our hands, fosters a sense of sustainability, and connects us with nature in a way that's impossible with store-bought food.

Seasonal Rhythms and Sustainability

Every jar you fill is a snapshot of a moment in time—a summer afternoon captured in a jar of strawberry jam, or the crispness of autumn stored in spiced apple butter. Canning encourages you to eat with the seasons and honor the abundance of each harvest.

By preserving your own food, you reduce reliance on store-bought, mass-produced goods, cutting down on packaging waste and food miles. It's a small but meaningful step toward living more sustainably.

Canning is also a doorway to reciprocity. Every jar of canned peaches or green beans gifted to someone else helps strengthen bonds and connect with others.

The Joy of Accomplishment

There's a unique satisfaction in hearing the pop of a jar sealing. Each batch is a testament to your effort and care, a reminder that you've turned simple ingredients into something to be proud of. Whether you're sharing jars with loved ones or stocking your pantry, you're participating in a tradition that's both practical and deeply fulfilling.

A Healthier Diet and a Brighter Future

Home canning offers a practical way to preserve food you grew yourself or even avoid wasting groceries. It's often a healthier option than commercially canned food because you control the ingredients and proportions. And when you pair canned food with ferments and dried food, it's possible to create incredible meals without ever going to the store.

As you close this book and open your first jar, know that you've joined a long line of preservers who've found joy in the simple act of saving the season.

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