

HEALTHY EATING

Upcoming Events:

November 28, 2012
Take the Mystery Out of
Winter Diabetes
Management
1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Center, Nebraska
No Cost

Prepare Canning Equipment for Harvest Season

Harvest season means fruits and vegetables are ripe for picking and eating, but what does one do with too many tomatoes or berries? With the right equipment, canning is a safe way to preserve produce at home.

Proper canning stops food from losing quality. Canning forms a vacuum in jars that tightly seals in liquid and air and seals out microorganisms. There are two main types of equipment for heat-processing

home canned food: boiling-water canners and pressure canners.

Boiling-water canners are kettles with perforated racks and fitted lids. Produce is filled in jars and processed in a boiling water bath. This method of canning works for high acid food, such as fruits, jams and jellies, because the acidity of the produce is high enough to prevent bacteria from growing.



A flat bottom canner must be used on an electric stove, while either a flat or ridged bottom canner can be used on a gas burner. Make sure the canner is not more than 4 inches wider than the heating element, and that it is deep enough to allow at least 1 inch of briskly boiling water over the tops of jars.

Pressure canners, which can reach higher temperatures than boiling-water canners, are used to process low acid foods such as vegetables, meat and poultry. Low acid foods don't have enough acidity to inhibit the outgrowth of bacterial spores, so they need to be processed under higher temperatures to ensure bacterial spores are killed before storage.

Pressure canners come with a jar rack, gasket, dial or weighted gauge, an automatic vent cover lock, a vent port and a safety fuse. Gaskets and gauges are two things that need to be checked annually.

Gaskets help seal canner lids so that steam doesn't leak out of the canner during pressurization. Make sure gaskets are clean and free of nicks before use. Apply a light coat of vegetable oil to gaskets on older model canners. Replace gaskets that are cracked or brittle.

Gauges display the pressure of the canner. Weighted gauges don't need to be checked for accuracy, but dial gauges do. They can be checked at a local Extension Office.

It is important to check and calibrate gauges to ensure the temperature and pressure inside the canner will be high enough to kill bacterial spores during processing. Additional time and pressure may be necessary at higher altitudes, so double check the altitude where the canning will take place and make appropriate adjustments to times and pressure according to lists in canning publications. For a map of different altitudes in Nebraska, check out UNL Extension Circular 434: Canning Basics at <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/ec434/build/ec434.pdf>

For more information on canning, go UNL Food's Home Food Preservation page for canning at <http://food.unl.edu/web/preservation/canning>.

Source: Julie Albrecht, Ph.D., Extension Food Specialist