

# Preserving: Start with Canning



If you haven't tried it before you may discover canning is much simpler than you may think. Just follow some basic rules. Don't be intimidated!

**Sources of information include:** The Ball Blue Book of Preserving, Maple Leaf Ace Hardware crew, WSU Extension (home canning basics - <http://foodsafety.wsu.edu/consumers/displayTopic5.htm>), National Center for Home Food Preparation (<http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/>), Ball Food Storage (<http://www.freshpreserving.com/>), Organic Gardening (<http://www.organicgardening.com/feature/0,7518,s1-65-69-96,00.html>) and other links on our website.

## Water Bath Canning Supplies:

- **Large lidded canner stockpot** - Must be deep enough to immerse the top of the jars under 1 to 2 inches of water.
- **Canning Book** - It should walk you through the easy-to-do steps and provide thorough details. The Ball Blue Book of Preserving we carry is a GREAT resource.
- **Canner Rack** - To keep jars upright & from knocking together.
- **Canning Jars** - Canning jars & lids are designed for home canning. Do not use any jar — commercial glass jars are not tempered and the surface of their rim is narrower and likely to chip or crack.
- **Wide mouth canning funnel** - To help keep the rims clean.
- **Two-piece lids** - The flat sealing caps should never be re-used. You'll need to use fresh new ones each time you can.
- **Clean dish cloths** - To wipe the rims before placing lids.
- **Jar Lifter** - These are specialized wide tongs. You may think you can use regular tongs, but the jars can be difficult to lift out of boiling water. This is definitely a use-the-right-tool-for-the-job situation.
- **Clean dish cloths** - To wipe the rims clean of food before placing the lid caps.
- **A heavy dish towel or absorbent mat** - To sit the hot jars on after they're removed from the canner. Don't place hot jars on a cool or cold surface.
- **Food mill, cheesecloth, or a jelly bag** - This is very handy for many items in order to produce clear juice or strain out skins or seeds. It is optional, but it makes canning easier.
- **Non-metallic spatula** - Releases trapped air bubbles, making your food look prettier and filling in the jar better.

## Basic Water Bath Canning:

Start with high acid foods that can be safely canned by using this method which preserves at the temperature of boiling water (212°F) using inexpensive equipment. Tomatoes and most other fruits are high in acid and great to start canning with. For low acid foods, use a pressure canner (a bit more complicated and costly).

- 1 - Prep equipment.** Inspect, wash thoroughly, and air dry.
- 2 - Prepare food.** Choose produce that is not overripe — in fact, adding in a few slightly under ripe pieces is good. Use a recipe or read the back of a jam/jelly package to wash, peel, and cut to recommended size/consistency. Add sugar/spices/vinegar/acids.
- 3 - Pack (insert) food into jars.** Use the funnel to pour liquids or insert food in hot jars. Fill it up as much as your recipe directs. Run a spatula through the ingredients to release trapped air bubbles. Wipe the jar rims with a clean, damp cloth to remove all traces of food on the rims. Place a cap on each jar and screw the lid band onto the jar firmly but do not over tighten.
- 4 - Process jars.** Fill the Canner with hot water. Place jars on the Canner Rack. Add water to cover the jars by an inch or two. Cover the canner and bring the water to a full rolling boil. Boil for the time stated in your recipe. Timing begins once the water returns to a full boil. A rough guide is 5 to 10 minutes for pickles, 10 or so minutes for jam/jelly, 20 to 30 minutes for fruit products, and 30 to 45+ minutes for tomatoes. Follow recipe directions. Turn off heat; use jar tongs to remove jars. Place jars on a towel or mat. As they cool, you'll get to hear the lovely "pop" indicating your lids sealed correctly. Cool several hours or overnight.
- 5 - Finishing up!** Your Canning Book will have advice on how to check the seals and how to store the jars. Always label your jars with the processing details (boiling time, temperature) and the date, then store them in a dark, cool, dry area.

The Ball Blue Book of Preserving provides detailed directions and recipes for all four of these preserving methods.

## Three other Preserving Methods:

**Freezing:** Freezing keeps the natural color, fresh flavor, and nutrition levels of most foods better than other preserving methods, it is simple to do, and takes little time! Fruits may be frozen in syrup, in dry sugar, or left entirely unsweetened. Most vegetables are blanched briefly in water before they are frozen. We carry a selection of freezer containers which will keep your food packaging easy and safe.

**Dehydrating/Drying:** Dried foods often have an appealing, flavor and are easy to use once re-hydrated. It also takes up less storage space than other methods. Electric food dehydrators are an effective, safe, and efficient method to dry food, although you can also use the oven or build drying screens. Ask us about ordering a dehydrator — a dehydrator is a smart investment if you plan to do much drying.

**Pressure Canning:** Low-acid foods are easy to preserve, yet require special handling to eliminate the risk of spoilage. These foods MUST be heat processed at a temperature of 240°F for the established processing time, which can only be achieved in a pressure cooker. Low-acid foods include many vegetables, soups, stocks, meats, poultry, and seafood. We can special order a Pressure Cooker for you, just ask.