

Just Because It Seals Doesn't Mean It's Safe

Barbara L. Ames

Wildcat District Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

Home canning can be an excellent way to preserve garden produce and share it with family and friends, but it can be risky or even deadly if not done correctly and safely. If home canning is done the wrong way, the vegetables you worked so hard for could become contaminated by a germ that causes botulism, a serious illness that can affect your nerves, paralyze you, and even cause death. Just because the jar seals does not mean that the food is safe.



Follow these two tips to keep your canned vegetables safe and keep them from spoiling.

1. Use proper canning techniques.

Make sure your food preservation information is always current with up-to-date, scientifically tested guidelines. Don't use outdated publications or cookbooks, even if they were handed down to you from trusted family cooks.

You can find in-depth, step-by-step directions from the following sources:

- The National Center for Home Food Preservation
- USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning
- The state and county extension service of your state university. In Kansas that is K-State Research and Extension.

2. Use the right equipment for the kind of foods that you are canning. This is done based on the pH (acidity level) of the food.

High Acid:

The boiling water-bath method can be used for high-acid foods, such as fruits, jams, jellies and pickles; or for tomatoes with an added acid such as lemon juice or vinegar. With a boiling water bath, you use a large stockpot, rack and lid. It's simple, and you don't necessarily have to buy a specific water-bath canner. Make sure the stockpot is big enough to allow water to cover the tops of the jars by at least 1 to 2 inches.

Low Acid:

Always use a pressure canner when canning low-acid vegetables (like green beans, potatoes and corn), meat, fish and poultry. Pressure canning is the only recommended method for canning low-acid vegetables, meat, poultry, and seafood because adding pressure is the only way

to bring the food up to the 240 degree temperature needed to safely preserve them. The boiling water method will only reach 212 degrees and will not protect against botulism.

If you plan to be pressure canning this summer with a dial gauge canner, now is a good time to make sure the dial gauge of your pressure canner is accurate. Most local extension offices in Kansas have a pressure gauge tester available and can test dial gauges at no cost.

If you would like to update your food preservation skills, Wildcat District Extension is offering “Preserving Salsa: On the Plant and In the Jar” on June 20, 2017, from 2:00 to 5:00 PM. The location will be our Independence office at 410 Peter Pan Road, Independence, KS. In addition to canning basics and safety, and a hands-on salsa-making demonstration, we will also be discussing garden plant bug and disease identification along with appropriate use of pesticides.

Home canning can be an excellent way to preserve garden produce and share it with family and friends. If you plan to be canning this summer, make sure you know how to ensure that all of your jars are sealed AND safe.

For more information about this topic or other topics, contact the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at [facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district](https://www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district).

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.