



Common Questions

Where can I find more information about food preservation?

- [So Easy to Preserve](#), University of Georgia Extension
- [Complete Guide to Home Canning](#), USDA
- [The Ball Blue Book](#)
- [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#), University of Georgia
- [What's Cooking with Mary Liz Wright](#), YouTube.com
- [Illinois Extension: Cottage Food](#), go.illinois.edu/CottageFood
- [Food Preservation Resources](#), University of Illinois Extension

Should pressure gauges on canners be tested?

Test pressure canner gauges annually or if they have been stored in an unheated space. New pressure canners come calibrated and are ready to use without requiring testing.

Many county Extension offices test dial gauges to serve residents. Locate and contact a local Extension office to schedule an appointment or to find out about testing events:

go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice.

Visit the University of Illinois Extension's website to find testing locations:

go.illinois.edu/PressureCannerTesting.

Is the open kettle method safe to use?

“Open kettle” refers to a method of processing that involves filling hot jars with cooked products without processing them in a canner.

This method is no longer considered to be safe. All canning must be processed in a boiling-water bath or pressure canner after using a tested recipe.

Can I safely recover the jam processed using the open kettle method?

If within a 48-hour window from filling and sealing jars, the product is still safe to process in a canner. Discard products that have been sitting for over 48 hours.

What equipment can be reused?

- Always use new lids.
- Reuse jars if they are free of nicks and cracks.
- Reuse rings if they are free of rust.

What types of jars are safe to use for canning?

For shelf-stable food, select jars that use a lid and a ring as a two-piece sealing mechanism.

Jars with rubber gasket seals between the jar and lid, such as the Weck brand, work well for dry or refrigerated foods but not for canning and processing shelf-stable foods.

Is it safe to use rings or bands that have some rust?

A few spots of rust on bands will not cause a problem, but try to use bands that are not rusty.

What is a good way to prevent rings from rusting?

Prevent rust by storing rings in a cool, dry place. Some people store canning rings between layers of newspaper.

Can rings be removed from sealed jars before storing?

USDA recommends removing rings for storage to better observe any signs of spoilage or sealing issues that might occur. Reusing rust-free rings also means less money spent on additional supplies.

How and when should I sterilize jars? Can I sterilize jars in the dishwasher?

Sterilize jars by immersing them in boiling water for 10 minutes when the recipe requires a processing time of less than 10 minutes.

Jars not requiring sterilization may be kept hot by immersing them in the canner in simmering water. Remove the jars to fill, and after placing the lids and tightening rings, return the sealed jars of product into the water to process according to the recipe.

For details about sterilizing jars, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation's website:

nchfp.uga.edu.



Can a large pot be used for water bath canning?

Yes, a large stock pot can be used for water bath canning if there is a barrier between the bottom of the pot and the jars; jar rings can even be used to create that barrier.

Ensure the pot allows enough room to cover jars with 1 to 2 inches of water, with an additional 1 to 2 inches of free space above the water level to accommodate the vigorous boiling.

What is the purpose of a canning rack?

A rack or other barrier at the bottom of the pot prevents glass jars from rocking during the boiling and canning process, which could cause the jars to crack.

Jars should not touch the bottom of the pot, and there must be enough room for water to circulate around jars.

Use jar rings or bands to create an appropriate barrier if a standard canning rack is unavailable.

Is it safe to lift a filled canning rack out of the pot?

No, it is dangerous to lift an entire rack filled with hot jars out of a pot; the rack might tip the jars as you lift it.

Remove jars individually by carefully lifting them vertically out of the pot with tongs.

Do all types of stoves work for canning? Is it safe to use camping stoves or propane burners for canning?

Some types of stoves cannot maintain the required heat level or accommodate the necessary equipment for safe canning. Follow the stove manufacturer's recommendations.

[The National Center for Home Food Preservation](http://nchfp.uga.edu) provides more detailed information:

- Differences between flat top, ceramic, and electric smooth top stoves.
- Portable gas and electric burners may be an option for canning.

Is it safe to use the steam canning setting on an Instant Pot or electric pressure cooker?

No, the USDA has not determined any setting on electric pressure cookers to be a safe method of food preservation.

Canned products processed in an Instant Pot or electric pressure cooker should be discarded.

How can an excess product be removed from an overfilled jar?

Use a clean spoon to remove excess product from jars.

Are recipes by volume or weight?

It depends upon the recipe; follow tested recipes exactly.

Can a sweetener be substituted for sugar?

Sugar is necessary for safe preservation in tested recipes. Do not reduce the amount of sugar or replace it with sugar substitutes.

Are low-sugar or reduced-sugar recipes available?

Low-sugar recipes may be found on packages of low-sugar pectin or on the [National Center for Home Food Preservation's](#) website.

For reduced-sugar preserves, purchase pectin sold specifically for making reduced or no-sugar-added jams and jellies.

What creates foam when cooking jam and jelly mixtures? Why is it important to remove foam?

Foam is simply air trapped in the sugar solution. If not removed, the air bubbles trapped inside increase the air within a sealed jam or jelly jar, which may shorten the product's life.

Does adding butter to reduce foam affect shelf life?

Adding butter will not affect the product's shelf life but might alter its taste slightly.

Is vegan margarine safe to use to reduce foam?

True margarine is 80% vegetable oil and 20% water, and therefore inherently vegan. Read the product's label before using it.

How much pectin do I need for strawberry jam?

The amount of pectin needed depends on the recipe.

The National Center for Home Food Preservation's recipe for Strawberry Jam calls for one package of pectin for 5 ½ cups of crushed strawberries.

Is it better to use powdered or liquid pectin?

Pectin is commercially available in both liquid and powdered forms; however, recipes are specific in the type of pectin used. Only use the type of pectin indicated.

Why do some pectins require using calcium water?

Some purchased pectins are activated by calcium water instead of sugar. Those products typically include the monocalcium phosphate powder required to make the calcium water. Read directions on any purchased product before using it.

If fresh fruit is unavailable, are there other options for making jellied fruit products?

Commercially canned or frozen fruit may be used to make jellied products. Since they are made from fully ripe fruit containing lower levels of pectin than under-ripe fruit, pectin must be added.

- Select commercially canned or frozen products without added sugar.
- Select fruits canned in their own juice.

Are pears or currants high in pectin?

Currants are higher in pectin; pears are not.

Can tropical fruits be used for canning?

No, tropical fruits, such as bananas and mangoes, are not recommended for canning.

Are elderberries safe for canning?

Elderberries are low in acid and cannot be processed safely into syrup or canned berries.

Making elderberry jam or jelly requires carefully weighing ingredients and following specific precautions outlined by [University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension](#).

Is it safe to refrigerate sealed products to speed up the cooling and setting process?

Refrigerating processed jars to speed up the cooling and setting process is unnecessary.

As jars removed from a refrigerator begin to warm up, “sweating” may lead to the development of rust on the rings and lids, ultimately compromising the seal.

Remove rings and dry both the lids and rings thoroughly if moving processed, refrigerated product from the refrigerator to the shelf.

If the top half inch of a light-colored jam darkens over time, is it safe to eat?

Lighter fruits, such as peaches, are more prone to darkening. If no other signs of spoilage or damage to the product’s jar or lid can be seen, darkening the top half inch of a light-colored jam is not a safety concern.

How long can a properly sealed product be stored?

Properly canned food stored in a cool, dry place will retain optimum eating quality for at least one year.

Canned food stored in a warm place near hot pipes, a range, a furnace, or in indirect sunlight may lose some of its eating quality in a few weeks or months, depending on the temperature.

Dampness may corrode cans or metal lids, causing leakage and spoiling food.

Discard any product in jars whose lids become unsealed after processing.

Can the leftover cooked fruit mixture be processed later?

Yes, but it must be reheated and processed. Or just keep it in the refrigerator and enjoy it now.

If a previously sealed jar lid pops open during storage, should it be discarded?

Yes, discard the product. If a lid is no longer sealed, the food is compromised and unsafe.

Are there places to borrow canning equipment?

Sometimes, canning equipment is available to borrow in a local “shared” or “incubator” kitchen.

For those who wish to preserve food but do not have appropriate equipment, check with a local Illinois Extension office: go.illinois.edu/ExtensionOffice.



Modified June 2025



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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