

Tips for Summer Canning, Freezing, & Drying

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Summer is in full swing, which means canning season is finally here and you are ready to start preserving your bounty! But before you get started, be aware of these 10 Common Food Preservation Mistakes people tend to make and do your best to avoid them.

- **Delaying preserving your bounty soon after harvesting**
To guarantee you will have the best quality, it's important to preserve soon after harvesting. If you are not able to, make sure to store produce in the refrigerator until you are ready to freeze, dry or can. Be sure to preserve within a few days of harvesting.
- **Using outdated or untested recipes for freezing, drying, or canning**
Using tested recipes from So Easy to Preserve (freezing, drying, & canning recipes), USDA Guide to Home Canning, UT Extension Canning Food publication, or the National Center for Home Food Preservation ensures that you are getting to the right temperature for the correct amount time for your chosen food preservation method.
- **Using the wrong canner**
Pressure canners are for low-acid foods like your vegetables, meats, and soups. Water-bath canners are for high-acid foods like jams, jellies, and pickles. Tomatoes are one of the few items that you can either pressure can or water-bath can, but you still need to add citric acid, vinegar (5% acidity), or commercial grade lemon juice. Moreover, remember to have your pressure canner tested every year before use. Reach out to your local Family & Consumer Sciences Extension Agent to have it tested! **Important note:** Per the National Center for Home Food Preservation, electric pressure canners or multi-cookers are not recommended for pressure canning low acid-foods. The USDA has not tested them and therefore cannot give proper recommendations for use. It is unknown if the proper pressure and temperature are reached to ensure a safe canned item. So, it is recommended to use a weighted or dial gauge pressure canner for canning low-acid foods.
- **Failing to vent your pressure canner properly**
Be sure you are venting your pressure canner for at least 10 minutes at a constant stream of steam before you put the counterweight onto the vent port to make certain that all that is inside the pressure canner is just pure steam and not excess air.
- **Forgetting to adjust your time or pressure for elevation**
The higher the elevation, the more time or pressure you will need to add to the canning process. This is where a tested recipe can help determine that time or pressure. Not sure what your elevation is? Reach out to your local Soil Conservation Services.
- **Using improper headspace for canning or freezing**
Having proper headspace for canning and processing for the correct time assures

that you have pushed out any excess air from the jar to help create that good seal for storage. Having the correct headspace for freezing will allow items to expand if needed.

- Freezing without blanching vegetables first
Blanching helps to reduce your loss of quality over time. Need to know how much time to blanch? Visit the UT Extension Publication website at extension.tennessee.edu/publications for their Freezing Foods publication.
- Using improper food preservation containers when freezing or canning
If you plan to freeze your food, be sure to use freezer-safe containers to help retain the quality of your produce and help prevent freezer burn. For canning it is recommended to use mason style jars and two-piece lids.
- Forgetting to rotate your trays to allow consistent drying for your food product if you use a circular-type home dryer
Many circular dryers have the heating element and fan either on the top or bottom of the unit. If this is the case, it is important that every so often you rotate your trays to ensure that everything is drying evenly.
- Using incorrect temperature and time for your food product
Drying can be a several hour process and many want to speed it up by increasing the temperature. If temperature is too high this can cause case hardening, which is when the outside of your food hardens too quickly, trapping moisture inside, creating an environment for bacteria to grow.

Have more questions when it comes to food preservation? Your local Family & Consumer Science Extension Agent is a great resource to reach out to for further information.

Resources

Canning Food

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB724.pdf>

So Easy to Preserve

<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/so-easy-to-preserve>

National Center for Home Food Preservation

<https://nchfp.uga.edu/index.html#gsc.tab=0>

USDA's Complete Guide to Home Canning

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/blogs/usdas-complete-guide-home-canning>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.