

7. IS HOME CANNING CHEAPER?

It really depends on your method of comparison. The first year will be the most expensive because of the initial investment in jars, processor (hot water bath and/or pressure canner), large pots and other small equipment such as a wide mouth funnel.

Food from your garden or someone else's will help reduce your costs. However, food in season will still make it a reasonable proposition. Don't forget to consider the cost of energy and your time. The most difficult price to determine is your sheer satisfaction of "putting things down". That counts too!

8. DO I NEED ANY SPECIAL EQUIPMENT FOR CANNING?

There are lots of gadgets you can buy, but the essentials remain:

- for high-acid foods (tomatoes with added citric acid, fruits) a hot water bath processor with a lid and a rack. It must be deep enough to cover the jars with an inch or two of water plus another couple of inches to prevent the boiling water from spilling over.
- for low-acid foods (vegetables) a pressure canner is absolutely essential.
- mason jars and closures.
- a saucepan to boil lids.
- a larger saucepan to heat jars.
- a pot large enough to heat food, syrup or juice in readiness for packing into jars.
- a kettle to boil water.
- measures, spoons, ladles, funnel, table knife to release air bubbles from jar before closing.
- to prevent burned fingers, tongs or a jar lifter.

9. CAN I USE MY PRESSURE COOKER INSTEAD OF A PRESSURE CANNER?

Only if your pressure canner has a pressure indicator. Pressure cooking is done at 15 pounds pressure whereas pressure canning is done at 10 pounds pressure.

Some pressure cookers (saucepan type) are not recommended for canning because:

- they may not have a gauge or control to determine the proper pressure:
- the size may not allow proper space between jars, and
- the jar size and the number of jars that will fit into the saucepan type of cookers are limited.

Resist the temptation of buying a pressure canner at a rummage or garage sale. You have no way of knowing how well it works, especially when the instruction book is long lost.

10. DO I HAVE TO USE SPECIAL JARS FOR CANNING?

Use only standard mason jars which are made for the sole purpose of home canning. Avoid using jars from commercial foods such as peanut butter, coffee, mayonnaise etc. as these jars are not tempered to withstand the changes of temperature during processing. They could break. In addition, it is not possible to get a tight seal with the lids that come with the jar and it is next to impossible to get new lids to fit these jars properly.

11. WHY HAVE I HAD SO MUCH TROUBLE WITH METAL LIDS NOT SEALING?

Be sure to read the instructions. The sealing compound must be softened before being applied. This is

done by leaving the lids in boiling water for at least 5 minutes.

12. WHEN PUTTING THE LID ON, HOW TIGHT IS TIGHT?

There are two types of closures for mason jars. Self sealing lids are enamelled metal, edged with a sealing compound which goes next to the jar rim (in place of rubber ring). This closure is tightened by screwing on a metal ring before processing. There is a similar one piece metal lid. Both of these should be screwed on very tightly before processing and not adjusted after processing as this may break the seal.

The other type of closure is a metal screw band with a glass lid and rubber ring. Glass lids, like the jars, must be free of nicks and cracks. The rubber rings must be replaced each time they are used and the metal screw bands as necessary if they are corroded, dented or stretched. When using this type of closure, the metal band is screwed on tightly then loosened by turning back one inch. The band is tightened immediately after processing as jars are removed from the processor.

Not recommended for home canning are the newer European jars with wire bales.

13. I HAVE OVEN CANNED FOR YEARS AND NEVER HAD A PROBLEM. WHY SHOULD I CHANGE?

Oven canning (either in a conventional or microwave oven) is not recommended. There is no way of knowing how long it would take the centre of the contents of the jar to reach a high enough temperature to assure a safe product. Some jars of food could be over-processed while others might be underprocessed—and therein lies the danger. If that isn't enough incentive to change, consider this: the jars could explode.

Also included in the "no longer recommended" category is the open kettle method, where food is cooked, immediately transferred to sterile jars and sealed. It is not considered safe. Now that you know the risks is it really worth tempting fate? Up till now, you and your family may have been lucky!

14. WHAT DO I DO WITH JARS THAT HAVEN'T SEALED?

If you have tested your jars and discovered that some haven't sealed completely, there are 3 alternatives. (1) Refrigerate these jars and use within a couple of days as you would any open jars. (2) Repackage immediately and freeze, following directions for freezing foods. (3) Reprocess by removing the lids, washing the jars and starting over. The food will be overcooked however it won't be necessary to throw it away.

15. WHAT DO I DO WITH A "BAD" JAR?

Once again, the signs of spoilage are bad odors, a slimy texture, dark discoloration, bulging lids (or even exploding jars) or rising bubbles.

Should you suspect botulism—burn it! Don't bury the suspected food because your family pet or other animals may find it.

Remember: If in doubt, throw it out.

16. DO I REALLY HAVE TO ADD CITRIC ACID TO TOMATOES?

Yes. While tomatoes are considered to be a high acid food they are not necessarily as high in acid as fruit. To increase the acidity, citric acid must be added. Citric acid has very little effect on taste.