Food Preservation Resources

By using reliable food preservation resources, you can be assured that home-preserved foods will be high quality and safe to eat. It’s especially important to use research-based home-canning instructions. Although other preservation methods such as drying and freezing may allow some room for creativity, canning must be done with precision.

Home-canned foods will be safe to eat if you follow research-based instructions exactly. The type of canner and length of time needed are influenced by several factors including the acidity of the food (or food mixture), the way it’s prepared, and the size of the jar.

Jars of food must reach a high enough temperature to kill harmful Clostridium botulinum bacteria. Only a pressure canner can reach high enough temperatures when you’re canning low acid foods (meat, fish, vegetables, poultry).

Safe home-canning recommendations are developed by researchers in food science laboratories. To determine a safe processing time, researchers record the temperature inside jars during the canning process. They do many repetitions to be able to calculate a safe processing time for each food.

You may not find research-based home-canning instructions for every commercially-canned food sold at supermarkets. Due to limited research funds, safe home canning procedures have not been determined for every food or food mixture.

U.S. Department of Agriculture/Extension Service Publications

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has long been the major source of research-based home-canning instructions. Their recommendations are published in the “Complete Guide to Home Canning” manual. View it online at the National Center for Home Food Preservation web site (at the University of Georgia): http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/ (click on “publications”).

State Extension Services affiliated with land-grant universities across the U.S. are partners with USDA. The Extension Service has long been recognized as a credible source of research-based food preservation information. The Extension Services of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho publish the USDA home-canning recommendations in Pacific Northwest publications, many of which are online.

Check the OSU website http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog (click on “nutrition and foods”) for publications on canning tomatoes, seafood, and smoked seafood as well as pickling vegetables. These and publications on canning vegetables, fruit, salsa, and meat/poultry can be purchased from the OSU website. Pacific Northwest and other OSU Extension publications are also available at OSU county Extension offices. These are kept updated based on current research.

Commercial Publications

Recent Ball home-canning publications have also been based on USDA recommendations. It’s very important to use up-to-date editions because home-canning recommendations have changed through the years. Use editions published after 1988, the year that USDA made many changes.
Searching the Web

Don’t assume that all home-canning recommendations on the Internet are safe. To evaluate their accuracy, a good first step is to determine who created the web site. Use the web address to identify the source of the information. The end of the web address identifies the type of organization: government is .gov or .us; education is .edu; commercial is .com; non-profit organizations are .org

The rest of the address can also help you identify the organization. For example, http://www.usda.gov identifies this as a United States Department of Agriculture site. Web sites that reference USDA recipes provide a safe source of information as long as the recipes are up-to-date. Extension programs often have the name of the university in their web address.

Some commercial companies publish food preservation information on their web sites. An example is the Jarden Home Brand site (affiliated with the Ball brand) http://www.freshpreserving.com/. Although this company has incorporated many of the USDA recommendations in their publications, commercial food preservation web sites may or may not have safe home canning recommendations. It’s a good idea to ask a food safety expert to review a site before using the recommendations.

Addresses of personal web sites often contain an internet service provider (ISP) company name. Be cautious about using food preservation information on personal web sites, recipe web sites and cooking exchanges. Anything can be posted on these sites. The recommendations may not be based on research. Always have these recipes examined by a food safety expert before using them.

Source: Family Food Education program