

Canning Instructions for Beginners: The Ultimate Cheat Sheet

The basics of canning food: *All the steps without all the fluff.*

Decide Which Canning Method You Want to Use

What Foods Are You Canning?

Are you canning a low-acid food, high acid food or one more toward the middle? **It is recommended that low acid foods be processed at the higher heat only a Pressure Canner can achieve to ensure dangerous microorganisms are destroyed.**

High acid foods can be canned using a Boiling Water Canner or Pressure Canner.

Do you know which foods are high acid or low acid? No? I got you covered. It is simplest to just give you the list of low acid foods.

In essence, low acid foods are: vegetables, all animal meat (including fish), soups, stews, anything with tomatoes in it and meat sauces.

Low Acid Foods List

- Asparagus
- Beans – Lima - Shelled (fresh), green and wax
- Beets
- Carrots
- Corn (cream style and whole kernel)
- Peas (green)
- Peppers
- Potatoes
- Pumpkin and Winter Squash
- Spinach and other Greens
- Soups (not seafood)
- Meat or Poultry



Canning & Preserving Equipment List

Glass Canning or Mason Jars - Make sure the jars you use are made specifically for canning and the neck fits the two-piece jar lid mentioned next

Jar Lids – Canning jar lids are actually two pieces. You have the screw band and a flat metal lid with a seal on the underside.

Boiling Water Canner – A Boiling Water Canner is in essence just a kitchen pot that is deep enough to double as your boiler.

- OR -

Pressure Canner - Many of these also double as a boiling water canner so you do not need to worry about buying two different appliances.

Jar Rack - A cake cooling rack can also be used if it fits flat in the bottom of the pan.

Jar Lifter - These are basically a set of plastic coated tongs that will help you pull your jars out of the water without you running the risk of burning yourself.

Optional Supplies

Canning Funnel – These funnels have a wide mouth and make it easier for you to fill your jars.

Magnetic Wands – This plastic “stick” with a magnet on the end makes it easier for you to pull newly boiled lids out of the water.

Bubble Remover Tool – This tool helps you remove the trapped bubbles from your jars. A silicone spatula will also work.

Note to Self: Always use nonmetallic utensils for canning. The metal might damage your jar without you even realizing.

Steps for Canning Food

In reality, you will follow a specific recipe for most of the items you preserve. i.e. Strawberry preserves versus pears in syrup versus pickles.

**Read through all steps first before beginning*

Overview of Canning High-Acid Foods in a Boiling Water Canner

1. **First, have all supplies prepped and ready before you begin.** Wash jars and lids in hot soapy water. Rinse and drain thoroughly. Don't worry about drying them.
2. Put as many empty jars as will fit into the boiling water canner, fill with water, put the lid on and turn on medium heat. **You don't need to boil the jars.** You just want the water to get to 180F/82C. Keep the jars hot until you're ready to use them.



3. In a small saucepan, heat the water on medium to 180F and place only the flat part of the canning lids into the pan. Keep them hot until you're ready to use them. **The screw bands do not need to be heated.*
4. Prepare your food. **If it will take longer than 30 minutes to make, wait until the food is cooking before you start boiling the jars and lids.**
5. Once your food is ready to can, take one jar out of the canner and pour the water back into it. **Put the jar on a heat protected surface such as a wooden cutting board.** There are also heat proof trays available if you prefer. **This is actually a really important step because if you put the jars on a surface that is too cold they can crack.**
6. Fill the jars with your prepared food. **You will need to leave at least ½ inch of space at the top of the jar (called headspace).** This space varies depending on which food you are filling. For example, fruit juice only needs ¼ inch of headspace.
7. Gently press your nonmetallic spatula or bubble remover into and out of the jar two to three times to release the bubbles. If needed, add more food to the jar. Do not neglect this step. **Removing the air bubbles ensures the lids seal properly and your food retains its quality.**
8. If necessary, wipe the jar rim and threads with a clean damp cloth.
9. Lift one of the flat lids out of the saucepan and place on the jar centering the sealing ring over the rim of the jar. Then screw on one of the screw bands. Screw as tight as your fingertips will allow. **Don't use a tool to do this. You don't want it to be too tight.**
10. Put the jar back into the boiling water canner.
11. Repeat the previous steps until you have all jars filled. Then fill the boiler pot up until there is 1 inch of water covering the jars. Cover the canner with a lid and bring to a full boil. **Once the water is continuously boiling, start the countdown based on the recommended time in the recipe.**
12. After the time is up, turn off the stove and remove the canner lid. Let it sit for approx. 5 minutes. *This is actually a really important step to the canning process so don't be in a hurry.* You're almost done. This might be a good time to refill your wine glass!
13. After your five minutes is up, remove the jars from the pot with your tongs. **Do NOT let them tilt!** Also, do not worry about any water that stays on the lid for now. It will evaporate. Oh, and do not dry the lids. You might mess up your seal.
14. Put the jars on a towel in a draft free spot for 24 hours. If you're concerned about a draft, drape a towel over them.



15. After 24 hours, remove the screw bands and press down on the center of the lid. If it is concave, you know it sealed properly. If you're not sure grasp the edges of the lid with one hand, put your other hand under the jar and lift up. If the seal is strong, it will stay firmly attached.

If you do not feel the jar sealed properly, either refrigerate it or immediately go through the process of resealing it again. FYI, reprocessing it may compromise the taste.

Additional Tips:

Always put hot food in a jar that has been preheated. You want to heat these jars in hot water. (A dishwasher can be used assuming you fill them while still hot.) NEVER heat them in an oven. No Bueno.

The flat canning lids can only be used once. The protective coating is permanently shaped by its first vacuum seal thus will not seal tightly to any subsequent jars.

Canning Food with a Pressure Canner

I don't mean to sell you short here but each food item has its own recipe and own way of being canned. **It is absolutely safest to follow the specific instructions for the foods you want to preserve.** This will prevent you from getting botulism – which can be deadly.

I highly recommend you pick up Ball's Complete Book of Home Preserving. In my mind, it is the best book out there with canning instructions for beginners.

They are incredibly thorough and leave no step out! I specifically picked up the Spiral Bound version as it lays out flat on the counter. There is nothing worse than a recipe book THAT WILL NOT STAY OPEN!

[Here is their website so you can check some of their recipes out.](#)

