



Canning Safety

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Home food preservation is on the rise. Many university extensions report high attendance at free public classes on safe home preservation techniques and web sites with canning advice seem to be springing up like weeds. Modern science has helped make preserving food at home safe with recipes and times for processing that ensure the elimination of pathogens that may make people sick. Yet, there are still outbreaks of food borne illness being reported. Why is this?

Well, as the Food Safety Adviser Handbook states, “Unless you know “how” the product was canned, there is no surefire method of telling. A sealed jar is not necessarily a safe jar!” Although current information available to home food preservers adheres to the latest safety standards, not every one who cans food follows the recommendations. Many people continue to can using “Grandma’s” recipes or recipes from old cookbooks which seem to somehow be “better” (not true) than the tested instructions from university extensions or canning equipment manufacturers. The truth is that some of the old recipes may be fine, but all of these should be reviewed by the local university extension Master Food Preservers for compliance with the most up-to-date food safety information available. For example, many recipes that are now outdated recommend turning jars upside down after processing. NEVER do this. Food can leak under the seal and create an avenue for pathogens to enter and thrive.

In addition to knowing how the food was processed, the wise consumer looks for indications that the food may have spoiled. Cloudy canning liquid may result from canning vegetables that were over mature; the starch from the vegetables may cloud the liquid. Hard water sometimes causes cloudiness, but most often, cloudy canning liquid indicates that bacteria grow in the jar. If the exact cause of the cloudiness cannot be determined with precision, discard the jar. Other signs of contamination include a strange odor. This usually means that the food will not taste right; throw it out! Mold growth on the lid or the surface of the liquid and/or food should not be tolerated. Get rid of any jars of food exhibiting mold growth. Inspect the jar before opening. If

the lid bulges, it could mean that the food has spoiled and will cause illness. Any lid that bulges or moves indicates that air has been able to enter the jar, and if air can get in, so can bacteria. Remember the adage: When in doubt, throw it out!

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.