



## **THE MASON JAR**

By Sari Cochrane

UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

How did the Mason/Dixon Line get its name? Anyone above the line drinks out of a Mason Jar and anyone below it drinks from a Dixie Cup. Of course, Southerners always have been drinking sweet tea from Mason Jars.

The iconic Mason Jar was invented and patented by American John Landis Mason in 1858. Heat based canning was first attempted by French cook Nicholas Appert in 1806 in an effort to preserve foods for the Napoleonic Wars. However, Appert's experiment failed as he was unable to create a reliable seal against oxygen and thereby inhibit bacterial growth. Mason solved this issue with a ribbed neck on the jar and a screw-on lid, creating an airtight seal. Processing with heat maintains the integrity of the product.

There are two ways to heat process product using Mason Jars and the two part lid. Boiling water or atmospheric steam is used for highly acidic foods including fruits, jams and pickles and pressure canning is used for low acid vegetables, meat and poultry.

The Mason Jar is a beautiful, thick and strong glass made with soda-lime. The jars have two mouth sizes, regular (2 3/8" inner diameter) and wide (3" inner diameter) and should always be checked for imperfections before use in canning. Jars are available in several volumes, including 4 oz half pint, pint, quart and half gallon. All jars are clear and come in many gem-like colors, giving the home canner unlimited ways to display tempting and attractive products. The Mason jars' strength and ascetics make them ideal for decorating as well. Pinterest alone has over 3,000 crafts using Mason Jars.

History shows the periodic resurgence of canning and the Mason Jar, but the recent resurgence has more to do with lifestyle than need. Improved transportation makes fresh produce available year round. However, the public has become aware of the advantages of buying locally grown foods and the true environmental and economic costs of transporting foods. Journalist Ariana

Kelly suggests the use of the Mason Jar has come to represent, “resistance to the mass production of food and culture; they emphasize the values of self-sufficiency and community.”

One of the many uses for Mason Jars is to store dried foods, including spices. Learn to make your own spice mixes this Saturday, October 17, from 10 am to 12 noon at the UCCE Master Food Preservers present *Variety is the Spice of Life: Peppers & Spices* at the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building, 311 Fair Lane in Placerville.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 and a Master Food Preserver will return your call. The Master Food Preservers are also available to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our international E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!