

Canning Safely

(Printed with permission from the Prairie Fruit Cookbook)

Two techniques to ensure safe canning are sterilizing before jars are filled and processing jars in a hot water bath. Sterilizing is critical if the water bath processing time in the recipe is less than 10 minutes.

How to Sterilize Jars

1. Check jars for any cracks or chips along the rim. Cracked or chipped jars should not be used for canning. They may shatter from the heat or they may not create a tight seal, leading to spoiled food.
2. Wash jars, lids and equipment in hot, soapy water. Rinse and air dry.
3. Place jars upright on a wire rack in a canner or large pot (if doing a small batch). If you don't have a wire rack, place screw bands on the bottom of the canner and place jars on top of those.
4. Fill canner and jars with water until they are completely covered.
5. Bring to boil and boil for 10 minutes. Boiling that much water will take at least 30 minutes, enough time to start preparing your food.
6. Canning lids (not the outer rim) need to be heated in a small pot of water to activate the seal; they do not need to be boiled. Follow the instructions on the lids, as some varieties have different requirements.
7. Keep jars and lids hot until ready to use. To prevent the glass from cracking, the jar and its contents should be about the same temperature.

How to Process Jars in a Hot Water Bath

1. Heat a canner or very large pot filled with enough water to cover jars with at least 1 inch (2.5 cm) of water.
2. Place filled jars in the water. Jars should be upright with space between each jar.
3. Bring the water to a boil. Continue to boil for the time specified in the recipe. It is important to start counting the processing time only when the water begins to boil. Processing time varies for each recipe, depending on type of fruit, type of preserve, jar size and altitude. If processing at elevations above 1,000 feet (306 m) you must increase cooking time (5 min/3000ft).
4. Remove jars from water and let rest undisturbed for 24 hours. You may hear a "pop" as the jars form an airtight vacuum seal.
5. Check the seal after 24 hours of cooling. If the lid is concave and remains down when pressed, it is sealed. If the lids are loose and the centre pops up and down, they are not properly sealed. These jars should be used right away and stored in the fridge for up to 3 weeks.
6. Label and date your jars and store for up to a year.



Testing for Gel Set

You can't rely on what the liquid in your pot looks like to determine if it will set properly. Because the liquid is being heated, it will never look like jelly or jam in the pot - no matter how long you wait! The best way to judge how it will set is to test it. There are three common ways to test for gel set.

Because pectin can be over-boiled, remove your pot from the heat while testing for gel set.

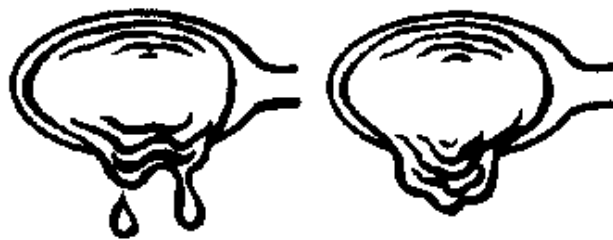
1. Chilled Plate Test

Place a small plate in the freezer. Pour a spoonful of jelly on the plate and cool for 1 minute in freezer. Take the plate out of the freezer and run your finger through the center of the liquid. If it wrinkles and you can push it around, it is ready. If it remains liquidy, continue to boil.



2. Spoon Test

Dip a cold metal spoon into the mixture. Hold it above the pot, out of the steam. Turn the spoon so that the liquid drips off the spoon. Observe the drips. If the liquid drips off the spoon one or two drops at a time, it is not ready. When the drips flow together and drop off the side of the spoon in a liquidy sheet, the mix is ready.



3. Temperature Test

Cook your jam or jelly unit it reaches a temperature of 105°C/220°F. Insert a candy thermometer vertically into the mixture being sure the tip of the thermometer does not touch the pot. If you're confident of your pectin, acid, sugar and fruit mix, you're jam and jelly will be ready once you reach this temperature. If you're uncertain, combine this test with either the chilled plate or spoon test.

