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Preserve Foods Safely for Your Family's Health

Whether you are experienced in food preservation or just starting, Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee recommends refreshing and expanding your knowledge base before you begin.

“Do your homework and learn how to preserve food safely before you jump into the process,” Blakeslee said. “Research has shown that 99 percent of problems with home food preservation are due to user errors.”

Holly Miner, Nutrition Food Safety and Health, FCS Agent for the Wildcat Extension District recommends taking a food preservation class. There are many things that can cause food to become unsafe. Common errors include using grandma’s untested recipe or a recipe from a source that has not been tested, wrong jar size for the processing recommendations, adjusting the screw band too tight, not adjusting processing time for altitude, inaccuracy of dial gauge canners, and more. Classes will be offered in the Wildcat Extension District in August and September. K-State also offers many resources for home food preservation. Check out a comprehensive guide on canning by searching our [online resources](#).

After learning recommended methods, examine home equipment. The Wildcat Extension District will test several brands of dial gauge pressure canners, such as Maid of Honor, Presto, Magic Seal, and National free of charge. All American canners are not able to be tested the dial gauge is an indicator of the pressure in the canner but a weighted gauge is used to assure pressure is accurate. We want all home-canned food to be processed correctly and safely.

There are currently no recommendations to safely can food in electric multi-cooker appliances. Even if it has a canning option, the research is not there to prove the method is safe.

Jars and ring bands should be in good condition, free of cracks, scratches or rust. Jars can be reused, but flats should only be used once. Gather all supplies for the amount of food you plan to can before you begin. Some foods may have additional safety considerations.

“High acid foods like pickles, preserves, and most fruits may be canned in a water bath canner. Low acid foods like vegetables or meat, must be preserved with a pressure canner,” says Miner

Some foods that cannot be safely canned include dense mashed foods, like pumpkin or squash; milk; pasta or rice; and baby foods, excluding fruit puree.

Miner says, “People put a lot of work into growing and preparing foods to preserve. Whatever the food is, use recommended recipes and prepare and process according to directions, to assure the foods you preserve will be safe for your family to enjoy later.”

Blakeslee, who is also coordinator of [K-State’s Rapid Response Center for food science](#), publishes a monthly newsletter called [You Asked It!](#) that provides numerous tips on being safe and healthy. Publications are also available at any Wildcat Extension District Office.

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Parts of this article were written by Taylor Jamison, K-State Research and Extension news service.

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