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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

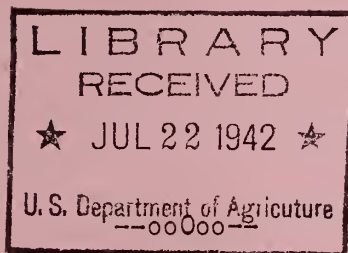
TUESDAY, July 21, 1942

ANSWERS FROM

home canning experts of the
U.S. Department of Agri-
culture.

QUESTION BOX

Cool jars up or down?
Can in store jars?
How seal bottles?
How test pressure guage?
Can fruit with molasses?



Questions about canning take up a good deal of space in the mailbag this week. As soon as home canning gets well underway, questions are sure to come in thick and fast.

Here's a letter asking whether to cool jars right side up or upside down. The letter says: "I have been used to turning glass jars upside down after canning to cool them. I have always believed this helped make the seal tight, and also showed up leaks at the top of the jar. But my neighbor insists that it is wrong. She says turning jars upside down may spoil the seal of some jars. Please tell me what canning experts advise."

Canning scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture say your neighbor is right. All jars should stand right side up to cool after canning. If you use rubber-ring jars, you can invert these after they are cool to test for leaks. If you use self-seal jars, never turn them upside down. If you turn them upside down before they are cool, you may break the seal, as your neighbor says. Test these self-seal jars for leaks by tapping the top with a knife or spoon. The sound will tell you whether the top is sealed on tight or not.

Here's the second question. A housewife says: "I have a large collection of odd glass jars that peanut butter, or pickles, or other store food came in. Could I use any of these jars safely for home canning?"

Canning scientists reply: Yes, if the cap and rubber gasket of the jar will form a tight seal. But many of the jars packed by commercial methods with peanut butter, mayonnaise, and other foods haven't the right kind of top to use over again safely. Jars safe to use for home canning must either have a neck with a standard screw thread so that a standard screw band, glass top and rubber ring together will form a perfect seal, or must have a metal cap with an attached gasket.

Just recently some manufacturers are putting their foods in new jars claimed to be safe for using again in home canning. Scientists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture have made no tests of these new jars yet.

Now for a question from a housewife who is bottling fruit juice. She says: "I have plenty of bottles on hand to put the juice in, but I don't know how to seal the bottles at the top. Do I use corks or what?"

The canning experts say: Use crown caps and a capping device which you can buy at any store selling canning supplies. The caps and capping device are inexpensive. You will need to boil the bottles to sterilize them before you put the fruit juice in. Don't boil the caps - just dip them in boiling water before you fix them on the bottle. Boiling caps may keep them from making a tight seal. By the way, when you put up fruit juice in bottles, fill the bottles only to within 2 inches of the top. This 2 inches of free "headspace" allows the juice to expand as it becomes hot.

Now for a query about the pressure canner. This letter says: "Every now and then somebody tells me about home-canned food that spoiled because the pressure cooker was out of order and didn't process the food properly. I am beginning to suspect that my pressure guage is a little off. Will you tell me how I can check it, or where to have it checked?"

Canning experts say you can't check the guage yourself because you have to have an accurate testing guage to check it with. Most manufacturers of pressure

cookers offer to check the pressure guage for accuracy if you will mail them the whole top of the cooker with the guage attached. Many State colleges or State agricultural experiment stations also offer to check guages for the citizens of their States. Some county home demonstration agents also are equipped to do this job for you. Better write the manufacturer or your pressure canner, or your State college about it before sending in the guage for testing.

You are very wise in wanting to have your guage checked. This is a good thing to do every year before canning season starts. The pressure guage is one of the most delicate parts of the pressure cooker. Success in both cooking and canning depends on its accuracy. It may easily get out of order. If it registers a pressure higher than it actually is, the temperature may not be high enough to process the food properly. On the other hand, if it registers a lower temperature than it actually is, the food may cook too much.

Of course, you know that you should never drop or strike a pressure guage, or allow water or bits of food to get in it. Keep the opening of the guage clean with a toothpick.

Another part of the pressure canner that must be in good working order is the safety valve. As you know, the safety valve is to let steam blow off automatically if the pressure gets up above the safety point. The valve protects against overheating and explosion; therefore, must be thoroughly clean. Follow the directions that come with your pressure cooker. If you have the ball-and-socket-type safety valve, wash it each day after using it. You can polish the ball slightly with steel wool. Your safety and the safety of the food you are canning depends on a clean safety valve.

Last question: "Can I put up fruit with molasses?"

Canning experts say it is possible but not a very good idea unless you like molasses so well that you are willing to have your canned fruit taste and look more like molasses than fruit. The flavor and dark color of molasses mask the natural qualities of the fruit.

That's all the questions for today. More on Thursday. And by the way, you are still welcome to a copy of the home canning bulletin. Write to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. for "Home Canning" Farmers' Bulletin No. 1762. It's free while the free supply lasts.

