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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Thursday, May 11, 1944

QUESTION BOX:

129 In 344 cap. 3
How long to store canned food?
How use pressure canner?
Sterilize jars for canning?
Avoid spoilage of tomatoes, corn?

ANSWERS FROM:

Canning specialists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

---ooOoo---

Questions about canning have the floor today,---as many as we have time for.

From now on, canning has priority over most food problems for most home-makers, since everyone is trying to put up just as many fruits and vegetables as possible for next fall and winter. Canning specialists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are ready with help, and have answered all of today's questions.

Question number one is about foods canned last year. "I still have some of my 1943 canned vegetables and peaches left in my store room.. Is there any special limit on the time I can store them?"

Canning specialists don't set an exact limit on storing home-canned foods, but in normal times of food plenty, they recommend eating up canned foods within the year, and that's a good rule now. Longer storage is safe if foods are properly canned, sealed air-tight, and kept in a cool, dark, storage place. But you'll soon want to put your 1944 supplies away in the space last year's products now occupy on your store room shelves. You know vitamin values deteriorate the longer you keep canned foods. So you'd better move the 1943 jars and cans out now, and use them up in the next few weeks.

If you have any canned vegetables that have been stored for a considerable time, be sure to boil them at least 10 minutes before you taste them. Boil spinach and corn 20 minutes. Burn up any food that is obviously spoiled.

Now for the second question. "What do I have to do to get my pressure canner ready for this season's work? It was in good order when I put it away last year."

If you have a dial-type pressure gage on your canner, check it with a test gage, if you can. The dealer from whom you bought the canner may have a test gage, or your county home demonstration agent may have one. If you have to send the gage away to the manufacturer to be tested, pack it like delicate glass.

If you find your gage is from 1 to 4 pounds off, you can allow for this when you estimate the number of pounds pressure to use. If the gage is 5 pounds or more off, get a new gage.

Now about the weighted type of gage. This type only needs cleaning at the beginning of the season. Wash a pressure canner thoroughly before and after each using, but never put the lid into water. Be sure that the pet cock, safety valve, and edges of the lid and canner are clean at all times. If the openings to the pet cock and safety valve are not absolutely clear, clean them with a toothpick or small pointed tool. Pull a string or a thin strip of cloth through the hole.

The third question is also about pressure canners. "Could I use a pressure canner for a water bath canner, to process fruits and tomatoes?"

Yes, the specialists say, if the pressure canner is deep enough. Set the lid on loosely. Don't fasten it or let it stick. And have the pet cock wide open, so that steam escapes all the time the water boils.

Of course if you are using the pressure canner like a water bath canner, you need to use the rack, and have the water in the canner come well up over the tops of the jars. Count the time just as you would with any water bath canner---begin when the water comes to a rolling boil, and keep boiling steadily for as long as the timetable directs for the food you are canning. Lift the lid occasionally to see if you need to add boiling water, to keep the jar tops well covered.

Here's a fourth question that often comes up: "Do I have to sterilize all jars used for canning, or just heat them?"

The canning specialists say you don't have to sterilize jars for canning---that is, boil them and keep them in sterile water until you fill them,---because

They will be sterilized anyway when you process the foods you put into them. But you do wash all jars and lids, except metal lids edged with sealing compound. Wash them in hot soapy water, and rinse well. When you fill containers with boiling hot food you want jars and glass lids hot. Otherwise they might crack. So, to have them ready, put the clean glass jars and glass lids and metal screw bands, too, into warm water at canning time, and gradually heat them to boiling. If you use metal lids edged with sealing compound, wipe them with a clean damp cloth, and dip in boiling water just before you put them on the jars.

We have time for just one more canning question. This homemaker says: "I had trouble last year with canned tomatoes spoiling, also corn. Please give the right method for canning each."

The canning specialists say that corn and tomatoes take different methods of canning. You can process acid foods like tomatoes, fruits, and pickled vegetables safely at the temperature of boiling water, in a boiling water bath. But corn, peas, beans, and other common, non-acid vegetables should be canned at temperatures higher than boiling---240 degrees or higher. You can't get these high temperatures except by holding steam under pressure. So for these vegetables use only a steam pressure canner.

Thick mixtures like corn heat through very slowly, so you need to follow the canning time very carefully. Can the corn whole-grain style. Creamed corn is too hard to heat thoroughly in home canning. You can get detailed information about canning each fruit and vegetable from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

That winds up the canning questions for today. We'll have more coming along right through the growing months.

