

Column Name - The Heartland Minute

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“Prep Tips for Canning Season”

It's that time of year to make sure everything is working properly before you start canning! Despite mother nature's best efforts to hold out on moisture, we still need to be ready for canning those fresh vegetables we do have. There is nothing quite like the taste of fresh vegetables that come straight to the table from the garden. When we have those vegetables in surplus we can turn to processing options like freezing and canning to make it last throughout the year.

Canning jars and rings can be reused if the jars are free of cracks and there is no rust on the rings. To keep damage from occurring, you can hand-wash the rings to keep them from rusting prematurely. Lids, however, cannot be used more than once. The reason for this is that they have a sealing compound that will become indented during canning and the lid will also get bent when opening the jar.

It is important to inspect canners to make sure they are in working order. For example, with dial gauge canners, start by checking the valves and pressure gauge. Our office would like to gauge community interest in having a place to have their pressure gauge tested. We would appreciate your feedback on if you would find it helpful for our office to have that capability. Feel free to call the office or email benjam63@ksu.edu with this feedback.

Another important piece of your canner to inspect at the beginning of the season is the seal between the pot and the lid, looking for cracks or dried rubber. If there are cracks in the seal, steam will leak out and the canner will never get to the proper pressure. The rubber plug can also wear out and will need to be replaced when it is damaged.

In regards to food preparation before canning, it is recommended to remove the peels to prevent unintended bacteria growth. When foods like potatoes and carrots are canned, bacteria and dirt can get trapped in the cracks. This is also true of tomatoes. When preparing your recipes for the canning process, it is always best to follow the recipe to the final letter and not to improvise. If you are looking for tried and true canning recipes, I encourage you to check out the K-State Rapid Response Center website.

After the jars have been processed, they should be allowed to cool in an isolated area. You can put a towel down on the counter with a cooling rack on top rather than putting the jars directly on the counter. Also, be sure to keep them away from drafts, so they are allowed to cool down naturally. One last piece of advice is to write the date that the food was canned on the lid before putting them into storage. It is important to use canned goods within one year of processing, allowing you to rotate them out for the next year's supply.

Information comes from K-State University food safety specialist and coordinator of the Rapid Response Center, Karen Blakeslee.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Ben Sims, at benjam63@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension-Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.