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### *“Summer Canning Prep”*

If you haven't already, now is the perfect time to dust off your canning supplies and get ready to preserve your summer garden harvests. Canning is a popular and effective way to extend the life of your harvest by heating food in jars to a temperature that destroys microorganisms that cause spoilage.

Take a moment to go through your canning equipment, especially if it hasn't been touched since last summer. Check for parts that may need replacing, such as the rubber seals on pressure canners. Many replacement parts can be ordered directly from the canner's manufacturer. While canning jars are reusable, always inspect them for cracks, chips, or scratches, which can lead to broken jars or improper sealing. Canning rings can be reused as well, but should be tossed if they show any signs of rust or corrosion. Canning lids can only be used once. If you have old, used lids lying around, throw them away and stock up on new lids.

Canning typically follows the rhythm of the garden, strawberries and cherries in June, green beans and other early vegetables in July, and tomatoes and sweet corn in August. High-acid foods like fruits, pickled products, sweet spreads, tomatoes, and salsa can be safely processed using a boiling water bath canner or a steam canner. Low-acid foods such as vegetables, meats, poultry, seafood, and wild game need to be processed by a pressure canner. When making jams or jellies, be sure to use the correct type of pectin listed in the recipe; liquid and dry pectin are not interchangeable. Dry pectin is usually made from citrus fruit and has a natural pH value of 2-3. Liquid pectin is made from apples and has a natural pH of 3-4. The gelling properties are a balance between the acid, sugar, fruit, and pectin in tested recipes. If you change one, you risk a runny or stiff end product.

Karen Blakeslee, coordinator of the K-State Rapid Response Center for Food Science, warns home canners to be cautious about using online canning recipes and tips. Using untested or unsafe canning methods can increase the risk of foodborne illness, particularly botulism, a potentially fatal illness caused by improper canning practices. Follow only tested recipes from reputable sources that have been researched and are safe. There is a lot of work and time that is invested in home preservation, and the last thing you want is spoiled food in the end.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.