



NEWS RELEASE

June 2004

By Anna Martin
Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor
UCCE San Joaquin County

It's Canning Season—Do It Safely!

Home canning is both an art and a science. Sometimes even when following recommended, up-to-date directions, something goes wrong. A jar doesn't seal, liquid is lost out of the jar, the fruit is floating or mold appears around the seal.

We can control mold, yeasts and bacteria adequately by the way we handle food in a clean environment and by following recommended safe procedures in "putting up" food.

What are spoilage organisms?

- Molds—Not all molds are harmful, for instance, those in "blue" cheeses are necessary for its distinctive flavor. However, when mold spores land on food and grow thread and streaks of discoloration, or cover it with fuzz, they may produce mycotoxins that may be harmful.
- Yeasts also come from spores and cause fermentation, which is beneficial in beer, sauerkraut and dill pickles, but awful in applesauce.
- Bacteria are tougher than molds and yeasts to kill, and some may produce hidden toxins. The temperature of boiling water is not hot enough to destroy some bacteria. That is why a pressure canner is required to kill any botulism in canning low-acid foods such as vegetables and meat.
- Enzymes in plants and animals are the inherent biochemicals that help them ripen and mature. If the process is not stopped at the desired maturity by heating, maturity continues and the product decomposes.

How do you know if a canned product is spoiled? Some of the signs include:

- Oozing around the seal.
- Mold around the seal or visible in the contents or on the underside of the lid.
- Small bubbles (gassiness) in the contents.
- Cloudy liquid or yeasty smell.
- Spongy-looking food.
- Unnatural color of food.
- Spurting liquid when opened.
- Disagreeable odor.
- Slimy product.

To avoid the disappointment of a spoiled product after all the effort of canning, use up to date directions and recipes, standard canning jars and two-part lids. Don't get creative with canning recipes.

The art comes from the experience of when is the product packed too full or too loose or determining just the right ripeness. The science is the reasons it is important to follow recommended recipes and procedures for home canning.