

# PRESERVING FOODS AT HOME

Preserving food using recommended methods can prevent contamination and helps maintain quality. Molds, yeast and bacteria can cause food to spoil. Enzymes in fruits and vegetables must be inactivated to prevent flavor and texture changes.

There are the three main ways to preserve foods at home—canning, freezing and drying. The method you choose depends on which suits your needs and whether or not there are safe guidelines. For example, there are no guidelines for canning corn on the cob. Freezing is a safer choice.

## Canning

The best method for canning depends on the type of food. Acid foods such as fruit, jams and jellies are canned in a water-bath canner. Low-acid foods such as vegetables, meat and seafood must be canned in a pressure canner to prevent botulism. Foods that are acidified, such as pickles and salsa, can be preserved using a water-bath canner.

### Canning Tips

- Follow a recipe tested for safety by USDA or Extension. Canning books published before 1994 may be out-of-date. Two reliable sources of canning information on the Internet are: [nchfp.uga.edu](http://nchfp.uga.edu) and [ag.tennessee.edu/fcs/Pages/Food/FoodPreservation.aspx](http://ag.tennessee.edu/fcs/Pages/Food/FoodPreservation.aspx).
- Wash produce thoroughly in clean water.
- Check the recipe for the exact amount of headspace. Too much headspace makes it difficult to remove air and produce a good vacuum seal. Too little and the lids may not seal.
- Test dial gauges on pressure canners each year before canning season. Weighted gauges do not need to be tested, but be sure your gasket and parts are in good working order.
- Label your jars with the name of the food and the date. Home canned foods have the best quality when eaten within a year.



## Freezing

Freezing does not make food sterile, but it reduces the temperature of food so that bacteria, molds and yeast cannot grow. It also slows the actions of enzymes so that chemical changes do not occur.

### Freezing Tips

- Wash produce as thoroughly in clean water.
- Blanch vegetables in water or steam to inactivate enzymes and kill microorganisms on the surface of the food. Check with your local Extension office or at [nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze.html) for recommended times.
- Cool foods before packaging and freeze quickly.
- Check your recipe for the exact amount of headspace. Food expands when it freezes.
- Use moisture-vapor resistant wraps and containers.
- Freeze foods at 0 F or below.
- Label your packages with the name of the food and the date. Frozen foods are safe even when frozen for long periods. But, they lose quality over time.



## Drying

Drying removes the moisture from food so that bacteria, yeasts and molds cannot grow and spoil the food. It slows the action of enzymes, but does not inactivate them.

### Drying Tips

- Wash produce thoroughly in clean water.
- Pretreat fruits to prevent darkening.
- Blanch vegetables in water or steam for recommended time.
- Prepare food in uniformly sized pieces to speed drying.
- Cut several cooled fruit pieces in half to test for dryness.
- Dry vegetables until they are brittle or crisp.
- Label your packages with the name of the food and the date.



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