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Food Preservation--Plan Ahead

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Food Preservation—Plan Ahead

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Many homemakers preserve food for their families. The most common method used is freezing, probably because it is quick and easy. Canning takes more time and energy, but is preferred by many for preserving the large quantities of fruits and vegetables available during the summer season. Time spent preparing and planning for canning will make canning days go more smoothly and be more enjoyable.

- **Get ready**

- **Use updated canning guides**

All canned food should be prepared following tested recipes. Research is done continually to provide the basis for updated recommendations. Many new guidelines, especially for tomatoes, have been released recently. Check your canning books and update them if necessary. The Extension office in your county has reliable, up-to-date low cost guides.

- **Assemble equipment**

Review the equipment needed. A large deep pot is needed for processing fruits and a large pressure canner is essential for vegetables, meats, poultry, fish and other low acid mixtures.

Review the recipes you will be using and get the ingredients, jars and supplies ready in advance. Wash the estimated number of jars needed the day before you will be canning. Set upside down on clean dishtowels or paper towels. Sterilization is usually not necessary. A checklist of other equipment would include:

Jars (not chipped)
Sharp knife
Measuring cups
Cooling area, newspaper, pad, cardboard, racks or board
Hot pads
Funnel
New lids
Clean cloths
Garbage container
Sugar
Salt
Rings
Jar lifter

- **Get organized**

Plan to organize your family's activities for canning days.
Keep means simple but nutritious. Cook ahead if possible.
Have laundry and other chores caught up.
Check your appointment calendar and rearrange if necessary.

Arrange for child care if possible, or plan activities to keep the young ones busy. Some mothers of young children like to do their canning before the kids are up or after they go to bed. Youngsters underfoot can add stress to an already busy day.

Be reasonable in estimating the time required to complete canning. The time required for preparation, waiting for water to boil, processing and cool down time will probably be at least 1 ½ hours per canner load. You may need to process part of the produce one day and part the next. The reduction is quality is probably more acceptable than an overly stressed parent or overdoing to the point of exhaustion!

- **Get set**

Preparations on the day you can or freeze are important too. Sharpen knives if necessary. Start with a clear and clean counter space, sink and table. In apartments with limited space, you may need to put canisters, spices or decorations usually found on the counter and table in a box and store them temporarily out of the way.

Dress in clean, cool, and comfortable work clothes. Some fruits stain clothing, so don't wear good clothes. Tying you hair up will keep you cooler and help prevent unwanted hair in good.

Set up your work flow in an organized manner. Right handed people work more efficiently if tasks move from right to left. Left handed people work best from left to right.

- **Go**

Now is the time to get to work. Can you get others to help? Neighbors or friends can work together, sharing costs and work effort. Husbands can accept responsibilities. Children should learn to help according to their ages and ability. Time spent working with our children is more fun, the children feel needed, and it can be a good time to talk and teach.

Other work-saving hints include:

- Do as much of one task at a time as possible and practical (wash all jars, prepare all lids, etc.).
- Divide work into manageable parts (prepare one cooker load at a time).
- Don't start more than you can finish. Fruits peeled too far in advance turn brown; also beets will turn dark. Heated products that are to be hot-packed will not be safe unless reheated before continuing.
- Clean up as you go.

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