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Living Well

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Common Questions about Storing Home Canned Foods

Oops! The lids didn't seal! I used the wrong pressure! Can these jars be saved? These are some of the questions that may arise when preserving home canned foods. Consider the following questions and answers:

How do I test the jar seal?

After the jars have cooled, the seal on home canned foods can be tested in one of three ways. The first option is to press the middle of the lid with a finger or a thumb. If the lid springs up when you release your finger, the lid is unsealed. Another method is to tap the lid with the bottom of a teaspoon. If it makes a dull sound, then the lid is not sealed. If the jar is sealed correctly, it will make a ringing, high-pitched sound. A third option is to hold the jar at eye level and look across the lid. The lid should be concave (curved down slightly in the center). If the center of the lid is either flat or bulging, it may not be sealed.

Is it okay to reprocess unsealed jars?

If a lid fails to seal on a jar, remove the lid and check the jar-sealing surface for tiny nicks. If necessary, change the jar, add a new, properly prepared lid, and reprocess within 24 hours using the proper procedures for that food. Another option is to store the jars in the refrigerator and use within a few days or freeze for later use. If freezing, be sure to have at least 1½ inch headspace for expansion.

Is it okay to reuse jar fittings (lids and bands)?

Lids should not be used a second time since the sealing compound becomes indented by the first use, preventing another airtight seal. Screw bands may be reused unless they are badly rusted or the top edge is pried up which would prevent a proper seal.

Should liquid lost during processing be replaced?

No. The loss of liquid does not cause food to spoil, though the food above the liquid may darken. If, however, the loss is excessive (for example, if at least half of the liquid is lost), refrigerate the jar(s) and use within 2 to 3 days.

How long can home canned foods be stored?

Properly canned food stored in a cool, dry place will keep its optimum eating quality for at least 1 year. Canned food stored in a warm place near hot pipes, a range, a furnace, or in direct sunlight may lose some of its eating quality in a few weeks or months, depending on the temperature.

For reliable recipes or to have dial pressure canner gauges tested at no charge, contact the Flint Hills Extension District office in Council Grove at 620.767.5136 or in Cottonwood Falls at 620.273.6491.