



Your Experts for Life

HE-535

Canning for Fairs and Exhibits

Many Alabama homemakers like to show their home-canned products in county and state fairs. A lot of skill and know-how go into blue-ribbon products, and the winners can be justly proud.

If you would like to receive awards for your home canning, this publication may help. There are certain qualities that judges look for when they are scoring entries. Winning canners work for these qualities while they are preparing their products:

- Quality of product
- Quality of pack
- Quality of liquid
- Appearance of jar

How to Win at Canning

Each type of food has its own characteristics to consider in preparing a first-place product. Generally, jars will not be opened nor products tasted by the judges. Therefore, quality is judged by appearance. However, this is not always the case. Flavor and texture are sometimes considered.

To be a winner, you need to be careful in *selecting, preparing, packaging, and processing* your food.

General Guidelines

- All entries must be canned by the person making the entry.
- All food entered in an exhibit should have been canned within the last food preservation season.
 - All vegetables (not tomatoes) and meats should be canned at 10 pounds pressure in a pressure canner.
 - All fruits, tomatoes, juices, jams, jellies, preserves, pickles, relishes, marmalades, butters, and conserves should be processed in a boiling waterbath canner.
 - All entries should be in clean, standard canning jars in good condition with new two-piece lids (lid and band). Jars and lids should be the same brand. If two or more jars are entered, they should be the same brand, size, and shape.
 - All jars should be neatly packed with the product level at the top and covered by liquid, if needed. The recommended amount of headspace should be left above the liquid.
 - All jars should be neatly labeled with the name of the product and canning date.
 - There should be no signs of spoilage, such as gas bubbles, leaky seals, bad odor, or cloudy liquid. Jars should be sealed when tested by judges.

Canned Foods Exhibit	
<i>Sample Scorecard</i>	
1. Quality of Product	45
a. Uniform in size and shape.....(15)	
b. Good condition; natural shape retained.....(15)	
c. Fresh, natural color.....(15)	
2. Quality of Pack	15
Full jar with good proportion of product to juice	
3. Quality of Liquid	30
a. Clear and free of sediment.....(15)	
b. Clear, natural color.....(15)	
4. Appearance of Jar	10
a. Clean, standard canning jar.....(5)	
b. Label of appropriate size and color, neatly placed and clearly marked.....(2)	
c. Shiny, new lids and bands.....(3)	
Total	100

Vegetables and Fruits

Selecting. Vegetables and fruits at their prime stage of maturity have the best texture, color, flavor, and nutritive value. Do not use any that are over or under mature. They should be tender and firm—not mushy, tough, or stringy. The color should be natural and uniform. *Never use artificial color.* Select pieces of the same shape and size to pack together. And, of course, no food should have spots or blemishes.

Preparing. The natural shape of the food should be preserved, if possible. Leave small vegetables and fruits whole. Those that are too large should be cut into a uniform shape and size. Some can be halved. Tomatoes should be quartered for an economy pack. Cut snap beans smoothly rather than snapping them. Sprinkle ascorbic acid mixture over fruits to keep them from turning dark.

If precooking vegetables or fruits, cook just long enough to look cooked but not overcooked. After heating fruits, let them sit immersed in the syrup until they cool. The fruits then absorb the syrup so they won't float as easily in the jars.

Packaging. Pack the food well—not fancy. The space should be filled but not crowded. Leave space enough for liquid to allow proper heat penetration during processing. This is important for safety and for good flavor. Greens and starchy vegetables, such as corn, shelled beans, and peas, should have enough liquid to make a loose pack when processed.

Fill nonstarchy vegetables and fruits to within $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the top of the jar. Fill starchy vegetables, such as corn, shelled beans and peas, to within 1 inch of the top. Pack jars neatly and attractively. For example, pack peach halves with blossom end toward outside of jar. Add liquid as you fill the jar.

Liquid for most vegetables should be clear and free from cloudiness and sediments. However, liquid in tomatoes should be tomato juice, and liquid in green shelled blackeye and field peas may be slightly cloudy. The liquid should cover

the food but should come no higher than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the top of the jar.

Do not use the water in which the vegetables were prepared. Fresh water makes a clearer liquid. Use soft water, and do not add salt as it may cause a cloudy liquid.

To make hard water soft, boil it for 15 minutes in a stainless steel or uncracked enamel boiler. Then cover it and let it sit for 24 hours. Next, *slowly* pour the water into a clean jar, being sure not to disturb the minerals that have settled to the bottom.

Liquid for fruits should be a syrup. Make the syrup according to a recipe for the fruit you are canning. The syrup should be free of any sediment. Make a fresh syrup or strain through a cloth the syrup in which the fruit was precooked. The syrup should cover the fruit but come no higher than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the top of the jar.

Quartered tomatoes will produce enough juice of their own. Add tomato juice to whole tomatoes.

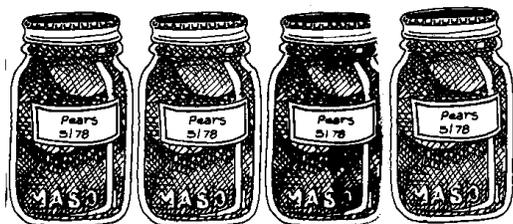
Use a plastic spatula to remove all air bubbles after packing jars.

Meats

Selecting. Fully mature meat is best for canning. Meat that is too young is easily ruined by the high temperature of a pressure canner. However, for best taste, the meat should not be too old, tough, or stringy. The texture should be reasonably fine.

Preparing. Cut meats into serving-size pieces. The pieces in each jar should be as uniform in size and shape as possible. It is not necessary to cut away all fat, but there should not be too much. A line not more than $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep is acceptable. Too much fat slows the heat penetration during processing.

Meat can be packed into jars either raw or precooked. If precooked, it should look moist and full of flavor, not over-cooked, hard, or dry. The color should be characteristic of the kind of meat used when it is heated or cooked. If it is to be browned, it should be browned only slightly. Too much browning gives the meat an over-cooked flavor.



Packaging. Pack meat neatly and attractively to within 1 inch of the top of the jar. Pack it snugly, particularly next to the sides of the jar, but not tightly. It should be looser through the center of the pack to allow good heat penetration during processing.

Liquid for meats should be the precooking liquid or the natural meat juices. For a hot pack, the liquid should come to the top of the meat. It should be a fairly clear broth, preferably jellied. For a raw pack, do not add liquid. Fried meats may be canned with or without liquid.

Jellied Products

At some fairs, jellied products—jelly, jam, preserves, marmalade, and fruit butter—are opened for judging. This makes characteristics other than appearance more important. Usually pint or half-pint jars with two-piece lids are best for jellied products.

General Characteristics

Flavor. The products should taste like the fruits from which they are made. They should have a full, fresh-fruit flavor. They should not be too tart or too sweet. They should not have an off flavor of any kind.

Color. The color should be the same as the fruits used. A dark color indicates over-cooking or scorching.

Special Characteristics

Jellies. Jellies should be clear and sparkling. When turned from the jar, they should quiver, cut easily with a spoon, and retain their shape when cut. They should be very tender when cut—not tough, stringy, thin, or syrupy. There should be no crystals.

Preserves and Marmalades. The pieces of fruit should be cut into uniform sizes and shapes. They should retain their shape during precooking. They should become thoroughly saturated with a heavy syrup, leaving them transparent and plump, not shriveled. The fruit should be tender when cut.

The syrup should be thick enough to move slowly with a definite pull when the jar is turned to one side. The pull and thickness will differ with the kind of fruit used. The color of the syrup should be the same as the fruit, clear and shiny.

Fruit Butters. A butter should move very slowly with a strong pull from the side of the jar when turned to one side. It may move in a solid mass.

Pickles

Pickles, like jellied products, are more likely to be opened at fairs than other canned products. This makes texture and flavor more important for judging.

Texture. Pickles should be firm yet tender. They should be crisp and plump, never watery. They should be cut into uniform sizes and shapes and should hold their original shape.

Flavor. Pickled vegetables and fruits should have their natural flavors or a pleasant combination. They should not be too sour, too sweet, or too spicy. They should be thoroughly saturated with the pickling solution or syrup.

Color. Pickled products should have the natural color of the foods from which they are made. Cured and fresh-pack cucumbers should change from a bright green to an olive green. *Never use artificial coloring.* In many cases, pickles should look transparent or semitransparent.





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