

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. In today's episode, we are diving into all of the myths and debate that surround home canned tomatoes. Believe it or not, because yes, there is more to it than you may think. And if you keep listening, I'll share the one thing you can easily add to your home canned tomatoes, you probably already have it in your pantry so you never have to worry if they are safe to eat. I'm your host Jill winger and for the last 10 years I've been helping people who feel a little uninspired by modern life, learn how to leave the rat race and create the life they really want by growing their own food and mastering old fashioned skills. All right, so there is a bit of, shall we say, conversation around home canned tomatoes. And I seem to have this knack for accidentally stumbling across controversy in the most neutral feeling topics, but it's crazy.
- Speaker 1: [01:13](#) When you talk about canning tomatoes online or in homestead groups on Facebook, things get kind of heated sometimes. And this whole debate stems from the fact that pretty much all of the older tomato canning recipes call for simple water bath canning. So if you've been canning for a long time or you have a grandma or a mom who is or was a canner, tomatoes were always going in the water bath. No question. It was just very simple and this was the way it was done for decades because tomatoes are a fruit and we all know that fruit is very well suited to water bath canning due to its acidity. So it was really a nonissue. Now things get a little more tricky recently because we have these canning authorities and these are organizations like the USDA or the national center for home food preservation and they're always testing and checking recipes and recommendations.
- Speaker 1: [02:26](#) They're kind of always working on stuff behind the scenes. But anyway, they have been or had been looking at tomatoes, you know, testing tomatoes, canning tomatoes, and they started to recommend that tomatoes be pressure canned instead of water bath canned. I remember the first time that I saw this recommendation, I'm like, that is ridiculous. Like, come on, I've water bath canned tomatoes, we all know it's acidic. This is ridiculous. But they actually do have a really good point. It is worth paying attention to even if it's not the way that your grandma did it. Right? So here's why it's kind of interesting and definitely worth taking note of. This change in recommendations is related to some updated research that has been done on tomatoes. And what they found is that tomatoes are not always acidic as we might think. So to give you just a little background, if you're new to this idea of canning or low acid or high acid foods, any food with a Ph of 4.6 or less can be safely water bath canned.

Speaker 1: [03:44](#) So anything less than 4.6, that's considered acidic and foods that fall into that realm would be most fruits. Like whether it's strawberries or peaches or apples, they all contain a lot of acid. So those can be water bath canned as can foods that have been acidified such in the case of pickles, right? Cucumbers are not acidic, but we add a whole bunch of vinegar to pickles and that makes them acidic. So we can water bath can pickles all day long with no issue. Now any food with a Ph higher than 4.6 is considered low acid. So that's things like pretty much all vegetables, meats, broths, soups and so on. So because foods like that don't have the acid, they need to be pressure canned at those higher temperatures in order to ensure they are safe to be stored on the shelf. All that being said, for years we all assumed or thought or you know, the extent of the research at that point in time showed that tomatoes were acidic.

Speaker 1: [05:03](#) So we all water bath canned them without a second thought. And then they backtracked a little because they started to realize that not all tomatoes are quite as acidic as originally assumed. And actually some are right on the edge of that 4.6 range. So it just can be really iffy. And there are actually a lot of conditions that can come into play with tomatoes that can change their acidity. What happens to your tomato when it's in your garden or while it's being grown on the farm can affect these levels. So things like decay or overripening. Now raise your hand if you've ever canned a smushy tomato, like I do it all the time, right? I don't want to eat them on the sandwich, but they're perfectly fine. They're not moldy. So I throw them into the sauce. There's nothing wrong with that. But those overripe tomatoes are probably lower in acid.

Speaker 1: [06:09](#) Even things like growing a tomato in the shade or ripening them off the vine can reduce the acidity. And again, I ripen almost all of my tomatoes off the vine because we have such a short growing season. Beyond just the growing conditions, we also can see different levels of acid in different varieties of tomatoes. There are a few myths kind of floating around that it's only the newer varieties or the hybrid tomatoes that are low in acid, but that's actually not 100% true because they've tested and discovered that there are heirloom varieties of tomatoes that are lower in acid as well. Basically in a nutshell, there's a whole heck of a lot of variables to consider with a tomato. And I highly doubt that you or I are going to spend the time in doing this detective work to figure out how much acid does this tomato have or how is it grown.

Speaker 1: [07:13](#) And like sometimes we just don't even have the capability of figuring those things out if the tomato came from a farm, you

know, several states away. So it's definitely something to keep in mind. We do need to acknowledge the fact that the acidity level in tomatoes is maybe not what we thought and then take actions accordingly. There's a lot of recommendations that are out there that you just pressure can your tomatoes and there's nothing wrong with doing that. You absolutely can if you have a pressure canner. But I know it does bother some folks because not everyone has invested in a pressure canner yet and you have a water bath canner and it's a little bit of a downer to have to stop canning your tomatoes the way you've done it forever. So thankfully there is a magic weapons. You don't have to go out and get a pressure canner just to do your tomatoes.

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And the magic weapon is lemon juice. As long as anytime you can a tomato at home, whether it's crushed, whole diced or in a sauce, you add some sort of additional acid, you're fine. Like you can totally continue to water bath your tomatoes. Okay. So lemon juice is definitely my favorite option when it comes to acid, but there's also a couple others. So you can also use citric acid, which is a white powder that comes from citrus. It's natural, or you could use vinegar. Honestly vinegar is not the one that I really recommend very often. It's fine in other canning recipes. With tomatoes, it's going to change the flavor quite a bit. So it's not my favorite. I do lemon juice as my first choice. Citric acid as my second choice. Citric acid should not add any weird flavor to your sauce.

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It's just a little bit more challenging to find than lemon juice. Okay. Here are a few numbers for you so you know how much of these acids to add. So you might want to grab a pen and paper if you want to write this down. When you're canning tomatoes and adding lemon juice, add one tablespoon per pint jar and two tablespoons per quart jar. When you're adding citric acid to your home canned tomatoes, you're going to add a quarter teaspoon per pint jar and a half teaspoon per quart jar. So you're seeing a pattern here that it's that quart is equal to two pints. So we're just doubling that amount and with the vinegar, and it's really important if you're going to use vinegar in any canning, you always use a store bought vinegar that's at least 5% acidity. If you're using homemade vinegars, it's really hard to nail that acidity level down.

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So make sure it's store bought in this case and with vinegar, it's going to be a little bit more at two tablespoons per pint and four tablespoons per quart jar. So what I do is I just line my jars out. I add the acid with my measuring spoon into each jar and then fill it with the tomatoes, whatever kind they may be. It's very simple and as long as you're doing this, you don't have to

pressure can your tomatoes, this additional acid will ensure that they're acidified enough. It will fill in any gaps that may be there due to tomato variety or how the tomatoes were grown and you should be set. Just as we wrap this up, a little bit of a reminder because you might be hearing this and saying this is a waste of time. I'm just going to skip the acid and I'm not going to worry about it.

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Grandma did this forever. I don't know why this is such a big deal, but I do highly recommend that you follow the recommendations put out by these canning authorities and the reason that they shift on, sometimes that frustrates us because they come out with rules and processes that we don't always understand at first glance. They're doing that to ensure that we're not dealing with botulism in our home canned foods. And in a previous episode we talked pretty extensively about botulism and why it's a big deal. So I'm not going to go into every single detail here, but in a nutshell, botulism is an extremely dangerous form of food poisoning and it used to be far more prevalent when people were canning more often with these unsafe canning methods. It can still happen today if you are using unsafe canning methods that has not been eradicated.

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However, we see far fewer cases of botulism because people for the most part are following these recommended procedures and guidelines. And as scary as botulism is, the good news is it doesn't have to be an issue because it's very, very easy to prevent. It's not just this mysterious thing that comes out of nowhere. It's very calculated and simple to understand how to keep it out of your jars. Botulism doesn't like acid and that's why acid is such a big deal. So as long as you're acidifying foods in the water bath canner or if you really want to pressure, or excuse me, if you really want to preserve lower acid foods and you don't want to add acid, just use a pressure canner. So it's very simple. You either have to stave off the botulism with acid or high high heat. Those are the two things it doesn't like.

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And as long as you're incorporating those into your canning and following those recommendations, it's very, very safe. There's nothing to worry about. But again, I recommend and encourage you to pay attention to the guidelines and understand why we do what we do. So you never ever have to worry about whether or not your home canned foods are safe. In a nutshell, I think tomatoes are an incredible staple for every homestead pantry. They are simple and very, very satisfying to can. I mean, they can go in every sort of dish under the sun. There's so many options. So it's totally worth your time to understand how and why to can them properly. And as long as you got your lemon

juice, you will be just fine. If canning is something that you have been wanting to learn but you're not quite sure how to start and it feels a little overwhelming, I've got you covered. I created a full ebook, complete with details, diagrams, and step by step walk throughs so you can start canning safely without the headache. Go to www.learnhowtocan.com for all the details and some fun bonus goodies as well. And that is it for this episode. Thank you so much for listening and I would be so honored if you would pop over to iTunes, leave a quick review and hit subscribe. That's all for now and I'll see you in the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.