

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcasts. In today's episode, we're diving into all things canning and we're going to talk about some of the biggest mistakes that I see people making when they start to learn how to can foods at home. If you have any sort of desire to start canning or maybe you've already been dabbling in it and you just want to make sure you're on the right track, this is the information you can't afford to skip because it's going to help you keep your family safe and avoid waste. I'm your host Jill winger, and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel 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. At the time of this recording, the garden is in full swing.
- Speaker 1: [01:03](#) Everything's planted. We're in that phase where it's just about watering and weeding, but I know better than to be lulled to sleep right now because just around the corner, about a month and a half or so, it's going to be time to start harvesting. And that's where things always get a little bit crazy on the homestead. We'll have buckets of tomatoes coming in, potatoes, green beans, cucumbers, you know, it's way more than we can eat during a given week and ya got to do something with it so it doesn't go to waste. Food preservation is a huge part of homesteading, whether you grow your own food or you're just capitalizing on local producers or farmers markets. Being able to preserve the harvest for later in the year is a valuable skill and it's really following in the footsteps of our ancestors who wouldn't have had easily accessible produce at the grocery store year around.
- Speaker 1: [02:09](#) I've done a lot of different preservation methods over the years and I still would say I use most of them at different times depending on what sort of produce I have available. But you know, everything from freezing and fermentation, dehydration and of course canning, they all play a role in how we stock up the food for the winter or at least make sure our garden work doesn't go to waste. And I think out of all those methods, canning is the one that I turn to time and time again as kind of a favorite actually. And I just love that it doesn't clog up the freezer because you know, we raise our own beef. So freezer space is always at a premium and trying to cram bags of green beans and between all of the roasts and the steaks is kind of a pain. So whenever I can preserve food without needing to clog up the freezer, I am in love.
- Speaker 1: [03:14](#) And I also like how it preserves the nutrients of the food. Interestingly enough, canning can actually do a little better job

than dehydration or even longterm freezing in regards to capturing more of the nutrients while that food is at its peak. So for me it's a win win. I think it's something that is very worthwhile for you to add into your homestead kitchens skill collection. Now believe it or not, this might come as a shock. There was a little bit of controversy around canning sometimes, and most of this stems from methods and techniques because you know, canning has been around for a while now and over the years recommendations and safety measures have evolved and sometimes folks are drawn to using more of the old fashioned methods when they're actually not super safe. So in today's episode, I'm gonna dive in to the top five canning mistakes I see people make and how you can avoid them, not only to help keep your family safe so you're not creating dangerous food that has different bacteria in it that could be harmful.

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But also just to help you avoid wasting food by having food that spoils or you know, ends up going bad on the shelf. Okay, so mistake number one, this is a big one and it is using old or unapproved canning methods. Now, this might come as a surprise to some of you because I'm kind of known as the girl who loves all things old fashioned and vintage. But when it comes to canning techniques, I actually stick close to modern recommendations and here's why. There are different methods to get food into jars and to seal it. And many of these methods have been used for decades, maybe even by your own family members to preserve food. And it's very likely that the food was preserved without issue. However, as technology advances and science advances, we've come to understand more about bacteria and food safety.

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And that's why there are organizations like the National Center for food preservation or the usda that produce these home canning guidelines. The purpose of these guidelines is not to limit what you can do in the kitchen or it's not the government, you know, trying to metal in your food supply. It's none of those things. It's really truly just to keep your food safe. Because while some folks back in the day got away with using unsafe canning methods, a lot of folks didn't. And there were cases of botulism, which is a very serious bacteria and food poisoning and a lot of illness related to home canned foods. And most of it was because folks didn't understand bacteria and contamination and all of that fun sciency stuff. But now that we know better, we have updated recommendations and it is in your best interest to follow those recommendations whenever it you start canning.

- Speaker 1: [06:59](#) So this is kind of funny, I had to share some of these. I was doing some looking online about old fashioned canning methods. I can't believe people use some of these. Okay. This is funny. I just have to share and I, I'm doubting that a lot of people did this. Maybe they did, but this is fun. One of the old fashioned methods that I do not recommend you use is compost canning. Yes. I said compost canning. So you would take a jar, put food in it, put the lids on, stick the jars in the middle of a compost pile. With the theory being that has the compost decomposes and heats up, it's going to heat the jars sufficiently to seal the jar and preserve the food. I feel like I don't need to go into a lot of detail as to why this is a horrible idea, but don't do that.
- Speaker 1: [07:56](#) Two other methods that are maybe not as far out there but still very sketchy are dishwasher canning and microwave canning. This is similar to the compost canning and that you put the food in the jar, put the lid on it, and then use the dishwasher or the microwave to heat that jar up to a point where it seals again, not a good idea. Mostly because those appliances cannot and will not heat the food to a high enough temperature. Oh, so I don't know about you, but every time I've put a tightly sealed container of food in the microwave doesn't usually end well. So yeah, don't try those either. Now these last two methods aren't quite as outrageous. They're actually more common. And I've seen a number of folks online, you know, because the Internet recommended these methods and I'm just going to advise you, yes, it's a free country and you have ultimate choice over what you do in your kitchen.
- Speaker 1: [09:04](#) But I would highly recommend you avoid these methods no matter what people on the Internet say. And these are inversion canning and open kettle canning. So inversion canning is primarily used with jams and jellies. It's actually fairly common and it's where folks take a jar, fill it with hot jelly or jam that's been simmering on the stove, screw the lids on and then flip the jar upside down and leave it on the counter. The theory is that the jars seal and they often do and it's good to go. You can eat it whenever you want. The issue with this method, even though it technically usually seals the jars, is that the jars are never heated enough at a high enough temperature to kill any potential contaminants inside the jar. And this is an important side note here. There are people who have gotten away with any of these methods at any point in time and they haven't died and nobody got sick and all was well.
- Speaker 1: [10:16](#) Just because someone had a good experience with this method doesn't mean that you should try it. There's just a much higher risk involved, which is why inversion canning is not

recommended by any of the canning authorities anymore. The other one that kind of goes along this same line is open kettle canning. Now this is where you would take the hot food and put it in a jar or maybe simmer the food in the jars on the stove top for a few minutes. Put the lid on and call it good. Now, some of you have may have accidentally done this before without even actually trying to can. There have been times when I've had a little bit of extra tomato sauce or salsa that's been heating on the stove and I just need to store it, you know? So I'll take an a mason jar, put an old lid on top and low and behold they heat from that hot food will cause the jar to seal.

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Just because it seals though does not make it shelf stable doesn't mean it's bad or it's wrong. You just want to still eat that food within a few days or whatever the normal range would be for whatever's in the jar. So a seal does not equate to longterm shelf stability. I just want you to keep that in mind. And I know for me, when I have my beautiful home canned foods on the shelf, I don't want to have that nagging doubt in the back of my mind that, oh, what if it's not that safe? You know, I don't want to have to worry when feeding it to my family. If we're all gonna have belly aches 24 hours later or worse. That feels like playing Russian roulette to me. And I would much rather have those jars on my shelf and have full confidence that we have nothing to worry about because all of the rules and steps were followed.

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Okay, so mistake number two that a lot of new canners make is attempting to use a water bath canner when a pressure canner is called for now this is tempting because pressure canners can be a little bit of an investment anywhere from like 80 to \$200 depending on the model. And so let's say you have some food you really want to preserve. The recipe says use a pressure canner. You don't want to fork out the cash, so you try to figure out how to work around it and use your water bath pot instead. As tempting as it is, you really want to avoid doing this because when a recipe calls for the use of a specific canner, it's there for a reason and generally when a pressure canner is called for, it's because the food that is being canned is a low acid food and low acid foods like meats, stews or soups broths and most vegetables cannot safely be canned in a water bath canner.

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With water bath canning. We have to have the presence of some sort of acid in order to make it safe for longterm preservation and when we combine acid plus heat and the right levels of acid, that gives us a jar of food that is safe to be processed in a water bath canner and kept on the shelf for many, many months. Now obviously low acid foods don't have

that proper level of acid, which is why a pressure canner is required in order to make sure they're heated to high enough temperatures to kill any potential botulism spores in that food. Now botulism, believe it or not, I actually think is a pretty interesting topic, so we're going to dive into that on a future episode. But just for now, I want you to remember if a recipe specifies pressure canner, use a pressure canner.

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Okay, mistake number three would be changing recipes or adding ingredients to a recipe. Now I am the queen of recipe adjustments and tweaks and ad libbing at any other time in my kitchen. I never hardly ever make a recipe as it's written unless I'm canning. When I'm canning, I follow it as is the reason for this being. If you get creative and start removing ingredients or adding extra ingredients to different recipes, you can actually throw off the balance of acid which may make a recipe that previously could be safely or water bath canned no longer safe for that sort of processing method. So for example, the ball blue book, which is a book I use a lot to help me stay on track with safe canning methods, has a recipe for home canned salsa and it allows you to use a water bath canner, which is great.

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It's easy, it's simple and I usually always have salsa ingredients in the garden. Now if I decided to get creative and let's say the recipe calls for two cups of vinegar in the salsa and I am like, you know, I don't really like vinegar, I'm just going to leave it out. That is going to reduce the acidity level of that salsa and it will no longer be a high acid food that I can safely can in my water bath canner. So in that case, I'm going to have to move to a pressure canner and it's probably gonna make it a little mushier. And so it just throws everything off. So the ratios of ingredients are there for a reason, especially with water bath canning. Now there are a few exceptions. You can safely adjust the amount of salt in a recipe without issue because salt is not there to act as a preserver. It's just there for flavor. So if you want to add another teaspoon of salt or take out a teaspoon of salt, that is perfectly legal, it won't hurt the recipe. Let also, the same goes for dried herbs. You want to add more Oregano to that tomato sauce or a few handfuls of time and to whatever else that is not going to hurt anything. It's just when you get into adjusting the ratios of those high acid or low acid ingredients that you need to be really, really careful.

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We're rolling right along into mistake number four and that would be not paying attention to head space. Now I've had plenty of non sealling jars in my lifetime and I'd say almost all of them I can attribute to improper headspace. So all of your canning recipes and you're using approved recipes, which I

always recommend, will specify headspace and this is simply just the amount of space left at the top of the jar after you get done filling it with food, it ranges from one inch to a quarter inch and it will differ for whatever you're canning. Now I'm not saying you necessarily have to get a ruler and measure it down to a 16th of a centimeter, but you want to be sure you're in that range and that ballpark of the recommended headspace with, if you don't pay attention to this, it's going to probably cause you a lot of issue with lids not sealing, which is a big pain because it really negates the whole reason you can do the food in the first place, which is to have a seal jar of food that you can sit on the shelf.

Speaker 1: [18:01](#) Thankfully, headspace is really, really easy to address. Just check it after you end up filling the jars, make sure you remove those air bubbles, which can cause a false headspace before you put the lids on and you should be safe and good to go. Alrighty. The last mistake I see a lot of canners making or maybe thinking about making are using the wrong jars or wrong lids. I get this question a lot because many of you are just as in love with repurposed things and recycled things. As I am now, I am a sucker for say, saving glass jars that food comes in, whether it's, you know, tomato sauce or different things I might get at the grocery store. I love to repurpose those jars and use them for food storage and other ways, but don't use those repurpose jars for canning. They're generally the lids don't fit on them the right way.

Speaker 1: [19:06](#) They're not going to be able to seal down appropriately. You might have a little issue if you're trying to put a ring and a lid on a different jar, you're not going to have the right fit. It's just not worth the headache. Not to mention some of the glass of those jars may not be designed for the high heat that is associated with canning and you might have higher incidents of breakage, which is just like the worst thing. It's not the end of the world, but like my stomach always sinks when I hear that crack in the canner and I opened the lid and there's floaties of food in there. It's just a waste and it's messy and you just don't want to do that after you spend all that time preparing the food and putting it in the jars. So stick with official canning jars, which thankfully are not expensive and can totally be reused or found at garage sales or secondhand stores, but that will save you a lot of headache and wasted food in the long run.

Speaker 1: [20:10](#) So in a nutshell, the wrapping everything up, canning is not as complicated as you may think. It's actually a really, really enjoyable skill once you get the hang of it and can create a lot of high quality homegrown food for you and your family

throughout the winter months when the garden isn't producing. Now, if your head is spinning with all the details and the numbers and the processes I just shared, I have got you covered. I actually created a full ebook that contains everything, need to know about learning how to can safely without the headache. It has recipes, tutorials, step-by-step processes. It's literally like me being in your kitchen with you as you get started and everything in between. Go to www.learnhowtocan.com for all the details and some bonus goodies as well. And that's it for this episode. Thanks for listening. I wish you all the best in your upcoming canning adventures and I would love it so much. If you could just take a minute and leave me a quick review over on iTunes. That's all for now, but I can't wait to chat with you on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.