



Canning 101: How Long do Home Canned Foods Really Last?

January 28, 2015 / [134 Comments](#)



You hear a lot of differing advice from people on the subject of how long it's okay to keep your preserved food once you've canned it. Some people say that it's a year to the date that it went into the jars. Others will tell you that they recently ate the last of the tomatoes their grandmother canned in the summer of '99 (1999, that is). I'm here to tell you that it's somewhere in between.

If you talk to one of the Master Food Preservers out there or folks from the [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#), the answer goes something like this: “For highest quality, [properly stored preserved foods](#) are best eaten within a year of canning.” ([Here’s exactly what the NCHFP says.](#))

Some people might read that statement and think that it means that they have exactly a year to eat through every last jar. The real answer is a bit more nuanced. You *will* get the very best flavor and quality from a jar that is in its first year, but there’s no internal self destruct device inside the jar that goes off on day 366 or 367. Preserves older than a year are still safe for consumption.

Home preserved foods remain safe for eating far longer than their first year, but their quality does decline the longer the jars remain on the shelf (or in my case, under the couch). This means that the jam you made two or three years ago is probably still just fine to eat but it may not taste quite as good as did on that summer afternoon when you first put it in the jars. Chances are good, though, that it will still be more delicious than anything you’re able to buy at the grocery store.

If you have some elderly high acid preserves that you’d like to eat up but are making you nervous, here’s what to do. Pull one off the shelf and take a good look at it. In the case of jams, jellies, butters, and other spreads, look to see if it changed colors radically (a little surface discoloration is normal, but total color alternation or loss is suspect). For pickles, relishes, and whole preserved fruit, look at the quality of the brine or syrup. Has it gotten muddy or opaque? Has the liquid level dropped significantly?

If you don’t see any major change, open up the jar. Look at the surface. Has any mold or scum developed? Give it a good sniff. Does it smells funky, dirty, or boozy (do check to see if you added alcohol to the starting preserve, as then it won’t be a useful symptom of spoilage).

Once you’ve determined that all is well, give it a taste (for spreads that have darkened slightly on the surface, feel free to scrape away that top half inch). If you like how it tastes, dig in and include it in your rotation of open jars. Repeat these steps for each older jar you have in your stash.

Sometimes, long storage will rob a preserve of its flavor, particularly if it was sweetened lightly, or with honey or a sugar substitute. If it doesn’t taste like a whole lot, it may not be appropriate for spreading on toast, stirring into yogurt or serving with cheese, but you can

always use up those less delicious jars in quick breads or as part of a braising liquid.

All that said, if you feel at all uncomfortable about something you canned, it is still always better to toss it than eat something that gives you pause. If you cringe every time you reach for a particular jar, it's time to empty it out and move on.

Additionally, sometimes people try new recipes and then determine later on that they just don't like them (not every recipe is for every person). If you made something and you just don't like it, either give those jars away to someone who will appreciate it or dump the jars. There's no reason to torture yourself with something you just don't like.

Like this:

Loading...

Related Posts:

- [Canning 101: Sugar's Role in Home Preserved Food](#)
- [What to do With Blackberries](#)
- [Making Jam from Frozen Fruit](#)

Posted in [canning 101](#)

[← Links: Rosehips, Muffins, and Winners](#)

[February Sponsors: Cuppow, Fillmore Container, Spice Ratchet, and Fermentools →](#)

134 responses to “Canning 101: How Long do Home Canned Foods Really Last?”

Tammy

says:

January 28, 2015 at 2:09 pm

I had a friend who helped her mother-in-law clean out her canning shelves and they found peaches from 1978! While they did ultimately throw them out they tasted them before tossing!!!

I keep careful records of what I can each year and aim to make a year's worth of each item. I overshot on tomatoes two years in a row so we're using up tomatoes from 2013 still. I was just looking at my canning shelf though, and realized that I should be able to use up all the tomatoes this year!

REPLY

Paul

says:

April 29, 2016 at 6:32 pm

Hi Tammy, I have two large jars of commercial cherries from 1978 that originally came in a syrup which is now largely crystallised. Hasn't been opened since 1978. I'm thinking of boiling them up in a flavoured syrup (sugar, star anise, orange rind, port). Have you had any microbiologists comment to you on your 1978 peaches?

REPLY

Eric

says:

January 28, 2015 at 2:14 pm

What does the asterisk in the fourth paragraph mean?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 28, 2015 at 2:51 pm

It was a typo that I've since removed. So sorry!

REPLY



mlaiuppa

says:

January 28, 2015 at 3:13 pm

I date my jars. Nothing lasts more than a year because I don't can that much and I do consume it so I'm usually out by the time season for that item rolls around again.

I do have some Thomcord grape jelly I put up 18 months ago and I'm still using it. Tastes just fine and perfectly safe.

Good to know as I put up some jams and jellies I want to use this coming 4th of July for my retirement party and that fruit will not be in season before my party to do again.

REPLY

vimala

says:

January 28, 2015 at 3:25 pm

I was wondering if there is anything like a botulism test strip kit?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 28, 2015 at 4:37 pm

There is no such thing. However, botulism can only develop in low acid products, so it is not a risk for most of what people can at home.

REPLY

Ron Randolph

says:

July 8, 2015 at 10:44 am

botulism will grow in just about any meat or vegetable. lots of people can vegetables at home. it is colorless, odorless and tasteless so if your product looks bad it's not from botulism. don't taste something to see if it has botulism. if you're concerned that it has botulism, throw it out or boil in an open container for ten minutes to make it safe.

REPLY

Faith

says:

September 17, 2015 at 9:05 pm

I'm a vegetarian germphobic ...when I can jams, or any vegetables, I follow all the sterilization standards set. I even drop a couple drops of collodial silver in my canned goods the name of the one i use is Argentyn 23 silver I bought at my doctors office. It has no flavor and I think it keeps things safe.

I thought that it is not recommended to ever can meat at home, but have a professional cannery do it. Plus now hunters, are having the meat tested for Lyme before even bothering taking it home. YIKES!

REPLY

Brent York

says:

December 18, 2016 at 10:13 am

No, hunters are not having meat tested for lyme. They're having meat tested for chronic wasting disease, which is no where near the same thing, and as far as science is aware isn't transmissible to humans. The reason it's tested for this is because it's a prion, so discarded meat, or even bone can continue the spread of CWD in ungulates.

On the other side of the coin, the bacteria that causes lyme (*Borrelia Burgdorferi*) is a weak spirochete that doesn't withstand even lower levels of heat (cooking) very well and is long since dead by the time you reach an internal temperature of "rare". It doesn't spread through the meat or bones of the animal and is generally transmitted via a tick bite from a tick who's first stage of life was attached to an infected field mouse. Since it's largely spread through ticks (and not through eating animal flesh) even vegetarians can get it. Since ticks like to hide out on bushes IE, plants, of which gardens are full, it's something vegetarians who garden have to be particularly aware of.

By the way, you might want to watch it with the colloidal silver. It's rare, but it can cause Argyria.

REPLY

Kat Cimenski

says:

May 6, 2017 at 7:31 pm

Very glad to ready your information here. Just having recovered from a bad case of salmonella, acquired while away from home and on vacation, and married to a hunter. About colloidal silver, Argentin 23 can be taken daily with zero risk of turning your skin blue, but other types can only be taken in like, a teaspoon maybe twice a week. My integrative care physician prescribed Argentin 23 for me as soon as it became available. I took it for 4 years with no problem. I had never heard of adding silver to home canning before. If you do chose to home can meats, you need to use a pressure cooker.

REPLY



Chris

says:

March 18, 2018 at 5:12 pm

Argyria is largely nonsense. The people who developed that made their own using home made contraptions, and not store bought or made at home using a professionally made device. And they took a lot.

REPLY

reina

says:

January 6, 2016 at 5:11 am

I have never canned before, and was wanting to can some homemade chicken soup, and some chicken tomato green sauce that I make. What would be the proper way to do this because I didn't even think about botulism. And I also wanted to can homemade chilies. Thank you

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 6, 2016 at 10:54 am

You need to use a pressure canner for low acid foods like chicken soup, chiles, and your green sauce.
Start here: http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can5_meat.html

REPLY



Warner W Johnston

says:

January 28, 2015 at 4:14 pm

“Food that has been properly canned will keep indefinitely; but after a year some chemical changes do occur” Blue Book dated 1999

I personally find sharp pickles that are over a year old to be better, sweet pickles are best in their first two years.

REPLY



Christopher Stogdill

says:

January 28, 2015 at 9:57 pm

I have some pickled garlic from an old recipe that specifies you should try to keep it canned for up to 10 years before use. It does get better with age, but I only like eating it cold as it is too mushy for my tastes otherwise.

REPLY

Angela

says:

January 28, 2015 at 10:35 pm

My mom and dad found some whole plums she pressure canned in the 80's. They said they were delicious and raved on about it. They will not waste "perfectly good food". I don't think anything I can would ever last that long!

REPLY

Megan

says:

January 28, 2015 at 11:16 pm

What's the life expectancy for open jars once in the fridge? I try to keep mine in the back to keep them as cold as possible, but that often means some will sit for a long time before I unearth them again!

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 29, 2015 at 11:06 am

As long as they aren't moldy or smell of fermentation, they're fine. There's no blanket guideline, because it depends on the amount of sugar in the preserve. Here's a blog post I wrote about how to extend the lifespan of your open jars.

REPLY

Sue Ann

says:

July 13, 2016 at 3:19 pm

Where is this blog I'd love to read it but don't see a link

REPLY

**Marisa**

says:

July 13, 2016 at 3:37 pm

Whoops! Here's the link: <https://foodinjars.com/2013/02/canning-101-extending-the-life-of-open-jars/>

REPLY

Zahn

says:

June 5, 2017 at 5:53 pm

Hi, I do not can much but I made watermelon rind preserves about ten or more years ago. Although the seal was good, the insides had turned very dark. I tasted a wee bit and it tasted all right, but I am afraid to eat more. What do you think.....

REPLY

**Marisa**

says:

June 6, 2017 at 10:34 am

I would not eat ten year old pickles.

REPLY

Christine

says:

January 28, 2015 at 11:31 pm

Great timing that you posted this! We made WAAAYYY too much nectarine butter in 2013 and are still consuming it and the family is getting a little tired of it. However, the last jar I pulled had separated a bit. There was liquid at the top. I did eat some since it smelled and tasted fine once we stirred all together. Your thoughts??

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 29, 2015 at 11:04 am

Butters are definitely prone to separation. If the seal was good and it didn't seem different beyond the separation, I'm sure it was fine.

REPLY

Robin Willis

says:

January 30, 2015 at 3:08 am

Nectarine butter sounds wonderful! Any chance you would share the recipe?

robbybaby@msn.com

Thanks!

REPLY

Eileen

says:

January 29, 2015 at 3:22 pm

Thanks for the excellent advice! I have some 3-year-old pickled beets that may get examined (and probably eaten) very soon. □

REPLY

Kim

says:

January 29, 2015 at 4:38 pm

A note on strawberries, peaches and apricots. After about 6 months or so, strawberries will start to lose their color and look pale and anemic (oxidation). Same with peaches and apricots. I find that strawberry jam really starts to lose its flavor more rapidly than most fruits. I'm not sure why or what may be happening. There could be a chemical breakdown of the fruit that causes this. Also, browning can occur. This doesn't affect the food per se, and it's still safe to eat, it just looks unappetizing. However, that being said always use all

your senses to gauge whether a food is good or not. If it doesn't look or smell right don't think twice about throwing it away. Also, don't throw potentially unsafe food in the trash or compost pile. Empty the jars into the sink and garbage disposal or wrap it up so no person or animal can get to it. Better safe than sorry.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 29, 2015 at 5:07 pm

You only need to take extreme disposal methods with suspicious low acid foods. If a jam or pickle has gone back, it's going to be moldy or slightly fermented. There's no need to wrap it. Additionally, if you believe something is suspect, putting it down the garbage disposal isn't a good option because that waste goes right to your local water treatment plant.

REPLY

TLK

says:

January 31, 2015 at 1:32 am

If I have a jam or jelly that is way past its prime, or I don't like, or just didn't turn out well (*cough* Cranberry Amaretto Jam with consistency of a car tire *cough*), I use it instead of sugar in "Woodpecker Pies":

2 cups crunchy peanut butter

2 cups lard

1/2 cup sugar or 1 cup failed jam/jelly

Melt together over low heat. Then add 4 cups quick oats, 4 cups cornmeal, 2 cups flour, plus the tail ends of bags of raisins, poppy seeds, cereal ... really anything that looks like a bird would enjoy.

I pack this mix into quart yogurt/sour cream/cottage cheese containers that have been cut to a few inches tall, with three holes punched near the rim for hanging. Store in the freezer. To feed the woodpeckers and other birds, I hang a “pie” against a tree trunk using string and a picture hook. It may take the birds a few weeks to find the food, but once they do they love it.

REPLY

The Goods – Mountain Mama Cooks

says:

January 31, 2015 at 9:37 am

[...] How long can those home canned goods live on your shelf? [...]

REPLY

Thomas Wells

says:

April 10, 2016 at 4:51 am

My Mom gave me some can goods dated 2009, are they still good to eat? How long dose caning goods last after caning them?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

April 10, 2016 at 9:50 pm

As long as the seals are good, they're probably not unsafe. The true problem is that they probably won't taste particularly good after seven years in the year.

REPLY

Rebecca Miller

says:

February 1, 2015 at 6:31 pm

I have a sort of related question. My mom recently bought me a large box of quart canning jars at Goodwill. Most are Kerr, Mason or Ball, but some are plain unmarked jars. Are these jars safe for waterbath canning? They seem lighter than the other jars but I'm not sure....Thanks!

REPLY



Marisa

says:

February 1, 2015 at 8:49 pm

You don't want to use old mayonnaise jars for canning. You can typically tell that you're working with them by twisting on a canning jar ring. If it keeps spinning instead tightening to a stop, you shouldn't use the jar.

REPLY

Sue Ann

says:

July 13, 2016 at 3:38 pm

Last year I purchased some canning g jars that have no markings on them either. They are either Bernardino or Golden Harvest jars. The York just like jars from the grocery store so I'll be using them for jams and jellies from now on just to be on the safe side a d I'll be looking closely at new jars before I buy them.

REPLY

Reluctant Foodie

says:

February 2, 2015 at 1:09 pm

Just as a point of reference, here is a blog post I wrote in 2012 about eating a jar of tomato sauce that we had originally canned in 2008. Just sayin'..... <http://areluctantfoodie.blogspot.com/2012/04/2008-was-very-good-year.html>

REPLY

Margo, Thrift at Home

says:

February 2, 2015 at 9:56 pm

thank you for such a common-sense post! Some of my canned goods stick around for a few years for various reasons, and I never have a problem. I've noticed that dill pickles get too mushy for our liking after a year, so I pay attention to those jars and only can what we can eat in a year.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

February 3, 2015 at 2:33 pm

You are so welcome! I'm glad you enjoyed it! And I hear you on the mushy dill pickles. They are hard to keep crispy!

[REPLY](#)**Sherene Burdick**

says:

July 10, 2015 at 5:58 pm

Ball make a product called pickle crisp, it is amazing ! It keeps pickles very crisp. I don't keep the jars of pickles in the hot water bath for too long either. 10 to 15 minutes, the longer they are in the water the softer they get,

[REPLY](#)**Joey**

says:

December 15, 2015 at 11:10 pm

I to will eat certain things like tomatoes that are many years past the expiration date if they were canned right. I use the if it smells like & tastes like it should, then it must be. I just made chilli with canned tomatoes & sauce from some store that were 3 years past the exp date and it turned out incredible. I smelled & tasted them first though. Common sense can sometimes go a long way.

[REPLY](#)

Debbi

says:

January 5, 2017 at 10:15 am

My Dad passed away in 2012 and we have pressure canned tomatoes from 2010 – 2012. Do you think they are still OK to use?

REPLY

Jim S

says:

June 8, 2016 at 3:29 am

Try fermenting your pickles instead of canning them. Too easy to do, and you will like them more.

REPLY

**Angela**

says:

February 5, 2015 at 8:28 pm

I think if you can them right, you won't have a problem. Items that aren't canned properly will spoil pretty quickly – and you will see it in the jar (as long as the jar isn't on a back shelf!). It also depends on what the item is. For example, I had some zucchini pickles that didn't stay crisp. They got a little mushy and that is just YUCK to me. But the recipe didn't have alum (I think that's the one for crisping). Anyway, I wasn't sure the longevity of it, but found out it's a year. Most other items seem to last.

Thanks for the post!

REPLY

**Jennifer**

says:

March 26, 2015 at 5:03 pm

What about chutneys? My understanding is that chutney may improve with age?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

March 26, 2015 at 10:03 pm

They do improve with age. Use your judgment.

[REPLY](#)

Jay Lough

says:

June 18, 2015 at 11:42 am

Doesn't matter how long it lasts ... just give away the excess each year as you can more.

I grow six or seven jalapeno plants every year on the back deck. My wife turns them into the most wonderful jalapeno jelly I ever tasted. If there's any jars of it left come time to can more on the following year we just take it to the church & let people in the congregation have it. During the year it makes great little gifts ... and it tastes good with bagels and cream cheese.

[REPLY](#)

Linda goltry

says:

July 4, 2015 at 12:17 pm

I have canned pie filling that I canned in 2010. Is this still safe to use?

[REPLY](#)

Marisa

says:

July 5, 2015 at 1:51 pm

As long as the jar is still tightly sealed, the color of the pie filling hasn't changed, and the look and smell is fine, then it's fine.

[REPLY](#)

Jessica

says:

July 6, 2015 at 1:10 pm

I canned plain red beets in a water bath canner in July of 2014. I way over shot what I needed for a year and have a ton left over. I know that a water bath canner isn't recommended but my grandmother swears its safe and she only ever used a water bath canner. That being said every time I eat my red beets it makes me very nervous. I am buying a pressure canner this year. My question is how long are my red beets really good for. I'd hate to throw 20 jars of red beets if they are still good to eat.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

July 6, 2015 at 2:33 pm

Those beets are totally unsafe and have been so from the start. You should throw them all away. You are asking for a botulism outbreak.

[REPLY](#)

Chyrol

says:

July 23, 2015 at 2:30 am

I am canning hot packed pickled beets again this year, and water bathing for the required 30 minutes for my elevation for a long shelf life, but nowhere can I find if it is safe to leave the spices in. Most recipes suggest removing spices prior to jarring/canning. I have made 3 different canned pickled beets recipes (hot & cold packing), and have left the spices in one of the recipes. I really enjoyed the taste of the spices left in, more so than removing the spices prior to packing the jars. I have found a few recipes that states specifically to put the spices in the jars prior to either hot or cold packing. I know leaving the spices in affects the taste, which is what I am going for. Does

leaving the spices in affect the shelf life? How much of a difference is it to use a 7% or 5% acidity white vinegar (most recommendations are 5% white vinegar) for the pickling liquid? Does cold packing and water bathing for 30 minute elevation affect the shelf life for pickled beets? as opposed to hot packing and water bathing for 30 minutes? Thanks for any info you can give me.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

July 23, 2015 at 12:22 pm

You can leave the spices in. They don't make it unsafe or impact the shelf life. You should stick with the 5% vinegar. 7% is designed for cleaning, not culinary applications. And a hot pack is probably better in your case.

REPLY

Chyrol

says:

August 3, 2015 at 5:46 pm

Hi, I am about to do some tomatoe canning again. But this year, I want to attempt to can Italian stewed tomatoes. I am using Roma tomatoes. (have done basic tomatoe and crushed tomatoe canning, but want to broaden my horizons). The thing is I can't find a decent recipe (checked at least 15) that hasn't raised the hairs on my neck wondering if I (plus other consumers) would survive the potential sickness it may bring on from the receipes' processings and/or ingredients, or potential problems with the shelf life. I only surfaced looked at your collection of recipes, but is there a recipe you can recommend? I use a water bathing method of processing and know the minimum time is 40 minutes using the hot packing method (longer if needed). What would the shelf life be?

By the way, I canned apricots this year and used the hot packing methodology instead of cold (the cold I had used in previous years). Fiasco is a polite way of describing how that whole canning process went. Blanching apricots is an art unto itself (the apricots were perfect for canning too). Thanks for any help you can give.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

August 3, 2015 at 9:44 pm

The only approved Italian stewed tomato recipes I can find require a pressure canner rather than a boiling water bath canner. There's a good one in the Ball Blue Book.

[REPLY](#)

Jean

says:

August 3, 2015 at 8:44 pm

I have pork meat I canned several years ago. Will it be OK to eat?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

August 3, 2015 at 9:40 pm

Did you follow proper canning procedure? If so, your pork is probably okay. Just give it a good, close visual check before digging in.

REPLY

Chyrol

says:

August 16, 2015 at 4:48 pm

Hello, I took your suggestion above regarding canning Italian stewed tomatoes and bought a very highly rated dual purpose canner/cooker from Pr.... All went well with all 4 different tomatoe canning recipes I used and only lost 1 jar out of 50.

I just finished pressure canning hot packed peaches, ensuring I followed every procedure to a T (air bubbles out, pints headed to 1/2 inch, packed hot in hot jars, etc, correct water level for canner, correct pressure, time, pressure down time etc.) . For whatever reason, there was leakage of fluids from some peach jars. (I made 3 batches and all 3 batches had fluid leakage from a jar(s))? Cleaned the canner inbetween each batch as well. All of the lids show a concaved (sealed) center. The seals were new and heated/sterilized prior to putting on jars. I will be calling Pr.... about this, but do you maybe have an answer as to why this happened? I never had this problem prior when I used the boiling water method! Any help will be great.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

August 16, 2015 at 9:28 pm

Having some loss of liquid from the jars of peaches is entirely normal and happens in a boiling water bath as well as in a pressure canner. There may have been some air bubbles trapped between the peach slices that pushed their way to the top of the jars that pushed some liquid out of the jars as the air vented during. There's no reason to call the company for this.

REPLY

Chyrol

says:

August 20, 2015 at 1:18 am

Hi Marisa, thanks for answering all of my questions. Picked up some of your book suggestions on canning and pickling. Great teaching information. Great recipes.

REPLY

Chyrol

says:

August 26, 2015 at 2:18 am

Hello Marisa. Does it matter if I use brown sugar (packed down to make equivalent to white sugar measurement) or white sugar in a recipe for canning? I've only used granulated white and honey combinations so far. So uncertain about the brown sugar usage. Going for a hot packing beet canning recipe with a dry red wine and red wine vinegar, but would prefer to use brown sugar as opposed to white. Can I leave the dehydrated spices in the jars or will the wines affect the tastes of the spices more than white vinegar? What would the shelf life be if I am using the standard water bath and/or pressure canner for canning beets with red vinegar and red wine.

REPLY

Joanie

says:

August 26, 2016 at 12:00 pm

Yes, there is a difference in the 'makeup' of them. Brown sugar is brown because of Molasses. Plus, there is more than one type of white sugar... The kind from a sugar cane, and the kind from a sugar beet.

Always follow your recipe's directions to ensure best product and safe canning method.

REPLY

Dianne

says:

September 5, 2015 at 10:19 am

I recently canned tomatoes in my pressure canner. Some of the tomatoes sunk from the top of the jar, while some stayed at the top of the jar. The seal is good. Why does this happen and is it still safe if the seal is secure, no color discoloration?

REPLY

jane

says:

September 25, 2015 at 1:29 pm

I canned zucchini 25 yrs ago and found some jars in the basement pantry. Safe to eat????

REPLY

**Marisa**

says:

September 25, 2015 at 5:09 pm

Possibly safe, but probably not very delicious.

REPLY

Sheila

says:

February 22, 2016 at 7:14 am

Pickled? I'm not sure about a recipe from that long ago. If it was not pickled, then definitely dispose of it as if it potentially contains botulism toxins. There used to be a pressure canning process for summer squash, now it is not recommended as there is a density issue. Besides pickling, zucchini may be safely PC'd in combination with tomatoes, but the ratio needs to be no more than 1 lb of squash to 3 lbs of tomatoes.

http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_03/tomato_okra_zucchini.html

REPLY

WSHiram

says:

August 24, 2016 at 10:02 pm

Was cleaning out an old house a few years ago, and in the basement root cellar, there were approximately 100 old blue ball jars, various sizes, mostly all still full/sealed. The labels on some indicated they were canned in the late 1940s. Green beans, cherries mostly.

I decided to empty them and clean the jars for a display, and as the jars mostly smelled alright, curiosity got the best of me. Amazingly, they still tasted alright! A bit bland, but decent enough, and no illness was suffered!

I am not saying I would make a habit of eating things that old, but given the right storage environment, it is possible to keep indefinitely.

[REPLY](#)**rocky**

says:

September 27, 2015 at 12:55 pm

marisa,i have a question,not about preserves. if i make a big pot of cream of asparagus or potaroe soup,and can in glass mason jars,how long should it last? how about cream of chicken soup? does the cream shorten shelf life?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

September 27, 2015 at 1:23 pm

This is nothing something you can preserve. Dairy products cannot be canned, even with a pressure canner.

[REPLY](#)**lorinda case**

says:

July 6, 2017 at 3:28 pm

How do brands can evaporated and condensed milk, and even whole milk? I have pressure canned milk before, butter too. So far, no problems. There's a lot of info on it on youtube by other experienced canners.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

July 7, 2017 at 5:31 pm

Commercial producers have access to machinery that is able to achieve higher temperatures and pressures than is possible at home. Just because you see someone doing something on YouTube doesn't mean that it's a safe procedure.

[REPLY](#)

Elizabeth

says:

October 23, 2015 at 3:05 am

My neighbor just gave me a jar of beetroot preserve, dated March 2011. It is now October 2015. Is it safe to eat??

[REPLY](#)

Mike g

says:

November 8, 2015 at 1:40 am

The date is November 8th 2015, looking at my canned beets from 2011 they are awefully grey and would not eat them myself. the colour has lightened up quite a bit and the syrop now looks a lot more transparent. I would only give beets a shelf life of 3 years maximum and 2 years for optimal taste and nutrition!

REPLY

Sandra

says:

January 12, 2016 at 2:10 am

Hi there, I have recently preserved some of my tomatoes using a vacola (a week ago). These tomatoes were washed and chopped up, so they're in pieces. Now I would like to make them into a passata. Can I re preserve them in a vacola? Thank you, I look forward to your response.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 13, 2016 at 11:19 am

I'm unfamiliar with a vacola. I'm not sure how to advise you. So sorry!

REPLY

Cindy

says:

February 7, 2016 at 10:12 am

I want to know what is the best storage for bean and ham soup? I don't have a pressure cooker/canner I can rely upon. So what I've done is sterilize my jars and fill them hot with hot soup. I have water bath them for 30 minutes. What is the best way to store them? Freeze or refrigerator? I don't have a lot of room in the fridge, but I don't know what's the safest. How long can I trust them in the fridge?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

February 7, 2016 at 10:03 pm

Those would need to be frozen for long-term storage. They won't last more than 5-6 days in the fridge.

REPLY

Ray Gustinson

says:

April 5, 2016 at 11:47 pm

When I was fighting in Vietnam, the us government were still giving us canned mre's that they had stockpiled from the end of ww2

REPLY

Joanie

says:

August 26, 2016 at 12:25 pm

While I'm not sure how your comment is relevant to the conversation, you left out some pertinent information to make your statement imormative or droll.

First, for those who don't know history, the Vietnam war (November 1, 1955 – April 30, 1975) and WW2 (September 1, 1939 – September 2, 1945) were 10 years apart. Given the long shelf life of MRE's (Meal Ready to Eat), it would be entirely plausible that some could still be in rotation during the onset of the conflict; therefore I find it highly probable you'd be eating WW2 produced rations. C-Rations last a long time. It's a bit of a stretch to think they'd be giving them to you and them 30 years old. Now... The question of your age. Assuming you were draft age and serving, at the start of the war, you'd be about 80 now.

So... When did this allegedly take place? What year were the rations to expire when you consumed them? Did they make you, or anyone in your unit, sick? Not that a MRE is a pinnacle of culinary excellence, but did they taste okay (given what they would 'normally' taste like)?

And since your post contained no real canning information, I'm not sure of your objective in posting it. Perhaps you could clear up some of the mystery...

Thanks

REPLY

Rhonda

says:

September 19, 2016 at 9:53 pm

It seems to me that Ray's comment is relevant to the topic being that the topic is how long properly canned food lasts. C-Rations were given to my father, also a Vietnam Veteran, and he says they tasted fine although the cigarettes were a bit stale. Additionally I'm not sure about the purpose to your little rant but you should get a life and show some respect.

[REPLY](#)**Sherry**

says:

January 10, 2017 at 5:51 pm

Assuming your disrespectful attitude, it's a bit of a stretch to believe you're an adult. Your are about 15, right? Shame on you! I completely agree with Rhonda's post below..."Get a life and show some respect."

[REPLY](#)**Bonnie Campbell**

says:

June 10, 2016 at 7:31 am

I canned some blueberry sauce just over a year ago. All of the jars are still tightly sealed, but the sauce has seperated and all of the jars now consist of a congealed lump in the center surrounded by liquid yhw consistency of water. I'm sure it would get back to its original consistency if I reheat it, but I'm wondering if this change in the jar is a bad sign.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

June 10, 2016 at 11:12 am

That loss of texture often happens in low sugar preserves. When you shake it, does it come back together? It's probably not unsafe, but it might not be as delicious as it once was.

REPLY

Kathy

says:

September 9, 2016 at 8:33 pm

I just would like to ask a question.. Can I leave my already sliced pears in water and in the frig overnight till I am ready to start my pear purserves the next morning??

REPLY



Marisa

says:

September 10, 2016 at 10:04 am

Yes. But you're going to want to add some lemon juice to the water, to keep them from browning.

REPLY

Linda K

says:

December 7, 2016 at 8:27 pm

I was wanting to know about some canned pickles, salsa, and butters. My son was cleaning out a house for someone and came across some canned items. Some have dates back to 2010. Some of the jars are a little opaque and some have some darkening on the surface. Are they safe? We opened and cleaned out the discolored food and tasted it. It tasted fine and did not have a funky smell. There are several jars and I would hate to throw them out if they are not bad.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

December 8, 2016 at 9:29 am

If the seals are good and the product hasn't changed color radically, they are probably safe. However, they may not be as good as they once were.

REPLY



Juan Pablo

says:

December 30, 2016 at 1:00 pm

Hi Marisa! I've been canning my favourite sauce, Tikka Masala. My question is, Do I need to refrigerate it while canned? I ask because it contains dairy products (heavy milk cream).

Or can I just keep on the shelf?

Thanks!

REPLY



Marisa

says:

December 31, 2016 at 6:28 pm

Anything that includes dairy products is not safe for shelf stable canning. You need to keep that sauce refrigerated.

REPLY

Diana

says:

January 18, 2017 at 1:52 pm

I feel like I'm not getting the answer I'm looking for .i canned speghetti sauce 7months ago,I didn't use any exta acidity ,what are the chances it's still good ?the sauce is sealed in ball jars .

REPLY



Marisa

says:

January 18, 2017 at 8:13 pm

Tomato products require additional acidity for safety. The spaghetti sauce you made is not safe and should not be consumed. It doesn't matter that the jars are still sealed. The issue is the fact that you are running a botulism risk.

REPLY

Jedda S

says:

April 16, 2017 at 8:35 am

Fresh vine blackberries that were jarred in '95 and '98. Liquid level is still the same as day 1, all seals are secure no leakage, only thing besides being over 20 yrs old is that the berry's have lost some color. They are more of a grey tone now.. Any suggestions on using or tossing?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

April 16, 2017 at 5:23 pm

They're probably taste like nothing that this point. I wouldn't try to salvage them, simply for that fact.

REPLY

Paige

says:

May 27, 2017 at 4:52 pm

Marissa,

I have jars of tomatoes left from 2014 through last year, not a lot, but if they look good and smell good can't i just make some good pasta sauce with them for use to eat up now with spaghetti? I did properly can them with a pressure cooker. We'd like to get the pantry cleaned out and re-stocked with everything from this year's garden.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

May 30, 2017 at 5:09 pm

If they look good and smell good, they're probably fine to cook into sauce.

REPLY

Mike

says:

July 3, 2017 at 2:10 am

I've eaten many jars of 15+ year old fish that my Dad canned in the Yukon. Still tasted good, but definitely not fresh.

[REPLY](#)

Walt

says:

August 6, 2017 at 4:50 pm

I think I have you all beat. We just discovered about 100 canning jars in my long-gone grandparents dug basement. These would be from about the time of the war, 1940–1950. We're talking 70 years old! I've opened a couple of jars and they are still vacuum-sealed. Blackberries, apples, beans, tomatoes, even corn on the cob. Also gallon jars of molasses and vinegar.. What to do, what to do?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

August 6, 2017 at 8:05 pm

You probably don't want to eat those things. Even if the seals are good, they're not going to offer much in the way of flavor or nutrition.

[REPLY](#)

Kathe

says:

August 10, 2017 at 11:52 am

I canned spaghetti sauce with meat with pressure canner 4 yrs ago. Also I have salsa and jellies canned with water bath from the same year. Everything looks the same as when I set them in the pantry. Do you think they are safe to eat?

REPLY

charles

says:

August 27, 2017 at 2:31 pm

Personally I'm fine throwing out a jar or two. I almost always eat what I can within a year of making it simply because I rotate my stuff as Im making it and I don't can 100 cans of the same thing.

That being said if I miss a jar and its going on over a year and a half I just toss it. At the end of the day it's typically only a pint or two and it's not that big of a deal for me.

REPLY

David grace

says:

August 31, 2017 at 8:05 pm

How can I preserve tomatoes while waiting to be canned

REPLY

6 Ways to Store Food Long Term – Survival John

says:

October 8, 2017 at 3:49 pm

[...] that the jars are sealed. Store canned items in a dark, cool, and dry environment. With regard to shelf life, items with a high acidity can last one to one and a half years. Foods with a low acidity can last [...]

REPLY

Ann Anderson

says:

October 18, 2017 at 8:57 pm

Hi, it's 2017, just found 4 jars of my beet pickles from 2015!! I opened tasted, o.k., just little duller in color! Can these make you SICK?? There pickled!! THANKS, Ann

REPLY



Marisa

says:

October 19, 2017 at 10:21 am

As long as the seals were good and you originally followed a recipe from a reliable source, you should be fine.

REPLY

Beth Ann fisher

says:

December 17, 2017 at 9:20 am

What about cooked / stewed tomatoes put in canning jars while boiling hot. Lids sealed. No water bath. No canner used. I just refrigerated the sealed jars. Some have Frozen in the fridge bot not solid. They are about 6 months old. Eat or not? Safe or not.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

December 17, 2017 at 10:51 pm

Because this is not a recommended process, I cannot advise you. You must use your own best judgment.

REPLY

Laurie

says:

March 2, 2018 at 5:37 pm

We have home canned tomatoes from 2011 some look fine some are dark. Going to throw the dark ones away. The comment was made that tomatoes needed additional acid added I don't remember adding any additional acid and my mom won't remember are they still good? Should I use or toss.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

March 5, 2018 at 1:04 pm

The additional acid is what prevents any possible botulism spores from germinating into a dangerous toxin. If you can't remember whether you added acid, you should probably throw them away.

[REPLY](#)**Michael**

says:

July 12, 2018 at 7:20 pm

I'm surprised at the fuss being made about adding lemon or some acid to canning tomatoes. I've been canning tomatoes for 30 years and never had a problem. That's many hundreds of bottles tomatoes consumed by me and friends. My mom did the same for 60 or 70 years and not a problem. Ditto my many Italian aunts. No lemon – no acid has to be added to tomatoes as far as my experience and those of my Italian relatives here in Canada. Any thoughts?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

July 12, 2018 at 10:32 pm

Tomatoes have been bred to be lower in acid than they used to be. Modern tomatoes have a higher pH and so have a higher risk of developing botulism without added acid. You and your family have been lucky.

[REPLY](#)**Chris**

says:

March 18, 2018 at 5:28 pm

Hi, New to Canning. Can you can an entire meal? It seems everything I'm coming across is just singular items. Thank you.

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

March 19, 2018 at 12:51 pm

You can can soups and stews using a pressure canner. What do you mean by a whole meal, exactly?

[REPLY](#)

Christy

says:

March 25, 2018 at 10:23 am

I was curious if you were asking about meals like beef stew and cabbage rolls? I had the same question.

REPLY

Ginger

says:

July 25, 2018 at 7:49 pm

You CAN can many things, but the question is whether they would be enticing later. You COULD can lettuce, for example, but YUCK! Who would want to eat that? Noodles? No. Nor things that are extremely dense, or things with milk products.

Be sure to get a good canning book and follow the directions EXACTLY. When canning low acid foods and meat, you MUST use a pressure canner. This is basically anything not pickled or jellied.

My county has a public cannery where people can go and use industrial-grade equipment for low cost. Many people can most anything they have a lot of, including meat they hunt. I know the three counties nearest us also have these canneries, sponsored by the school system and the Co-op Extension Service.

REPLY

Aimee

says:

March 26, 2018 at 1:27 pm

How long do dill pickles last?

[REPLY](#)**Marisa**

says:

March 26, 2018 at 2:19 pm

It depends on how much vinegar is in the brine, how you processed them, and how you're storing them. Typically about a year if they've been processed correctly.

[REPLY](#)**Ryan**

says:

June 1, 2018 at 8:08 pm

I recently ate my grandmas jar of pickled beans from August 2008. They taste exactly the same as newer batches, just a little mushier. I feel fine lol

[REPLY](#)**John**

says:

April 4, 2018 at 6:27 pm

I opened a jar of tomatoes that was canned in 2015 and they were fine.

[REPLY](#)

Daryl

says:

April 5, 2018 at 2:23 am

Just opened jars of tomato juice from 08/2012 and it was just fine

[REPLY](#)

Debbie

says:

May 24, 2018 at 3:04 pm

I would add when opening a jar that is older, pay attention to HOW the lids comes off. If it seems to 'fly' off or seems to have pressure behind the lid, then throw it out. Botulism can NOT be detected by taste/smell or color – which is one reason it is hard to detect. However, the gas by product of botulism increases the pressure in the jar so the lid “POPS” off with force. If there is any doubt – throw it out.

[REPLY](#)

Rock Barnett

says:

June 24, 2018 at 6:37 pm

I just opened a jar of mulberry syrurp, (was supposed to be jelly but wouldn't set so it turned into great syrurp). Made said syrurp in 2010. No mold, tasted just as good as the day it was canned. Not sure I would try other canned goods that old, but it was my last jar and don't have access to mulberrys anymore. Everyone thought it was the best syrurp they ever had.

[REPLY](#)

Dawn Duddy

says:

August 26, 2018 at 9:50 am

I have a question I was hoping someone could help me with.... I make chili with meat and I also make a pot of different type beans with meat as well. The beans I use come from cans. I just bought a pressure canner cooker and want to jar the beans and chili to eat later. Does anyone have any info that would be helpful on how to go about it... I'm not sure of the settings on the pressure cooker for the chili and beans and also unsure of the shelf life after. Thank you in advance

[REPLY](#)

Marisa

says:

August 27, 2018 at 9:23 am

There are no electric multi cookers that are safe to use as pressure canners, no matter what the box tells you.

[REPLY](#)

Don Red

says:

September 4, 2018 at 1:45 am

Ball makes one for canning...

REPLY



Marisa

says:

September 4, 2018 at 12:05 pm

Unfortunately, they do not. They have an electric water bath canner and an electric canner that uses a small amount of pressure. However, it is not an electric pressure canner like what the previous commenter was asking about.

REPLY

Janet Brooke

says:

April 18, 2019 at 10:24 am

I have a store bought jar of vine leaves in brine. It has been kept in the fridge & the safety button hasn't popped. It is now nearly 6 years old. I wanted to make dolmas so they will be cooked. What do you advise?

REPLY

**Marisa**

says:

April 18, 2019 at 2:27 pm

They're probably okay, but that long in the jar means that they might have experienced some decline in quality. It's really a call that only you can make.

REPLY

Theresa

says:

April 24, 2019 at 12:20 pm

I canned antipasto 3 years ago. I tasted it. It tasted ok – maybe a little dry. Do you think it is still safe to eat ?

REPLY

**Marisa**

says:

April 27, 2019 at 12:47 am

As long as you used a recipe from a reliable source in the first place, it should still be okay.

REPLY

Cal Nor

says:

May 11, 2019 at 7:52 am

Now there are Botulism Test Strips.

REPLY



Marisa

says:

May 11, 2019 at 7:32 pm

Do you have a source for them? I've never heard of such a thing.

REPLY

Crock-Pot Apple Butter | barefeetinthekitchen.com

says:

October 2, 2019 at 2:54 pm

[...] for safety and effectiveness. When finished, your canned apple butter will last for months or up to a couple of years with no refrigeration required (until unsealed, of [...])

REPLY

Sabrina

says:

November 9, 2019 at 2:41 am

What about plums in very light syrup (used a ball recipe) water bath canned 3 years old? Does water bath vs pressure canning make a difference in the longevity/safety of canned fruit?

REPLY



Marisa

says:

November 11, 2019 at 11:24 pm

Pressure canning won't make a difference in longevity. In fact, using a pressure canner on fragile fruit can break down the flesh more than a boiling water bath canner would, and so can shorten the quality of the product's shelf life.

REPLY

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Name *

Email *

Website

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.

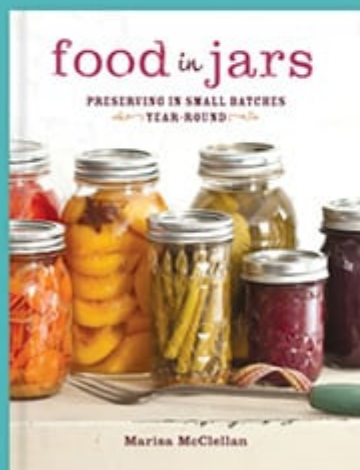
POST COMMENT

PARTNERS





Buy the Cookbooks







Food in Jars

✉ Contact Food in Jars

Search

Mailing List

Sign up for the Food in Jars email list & get my
Beginner's Canning Guide! Enter your email below:

email address	Subscribe
---------------	-----------

Follow Me



© 2020 Food in Jars. [Privacy Policy](#)

[Advertising & Sponsorship Opportunities](#)