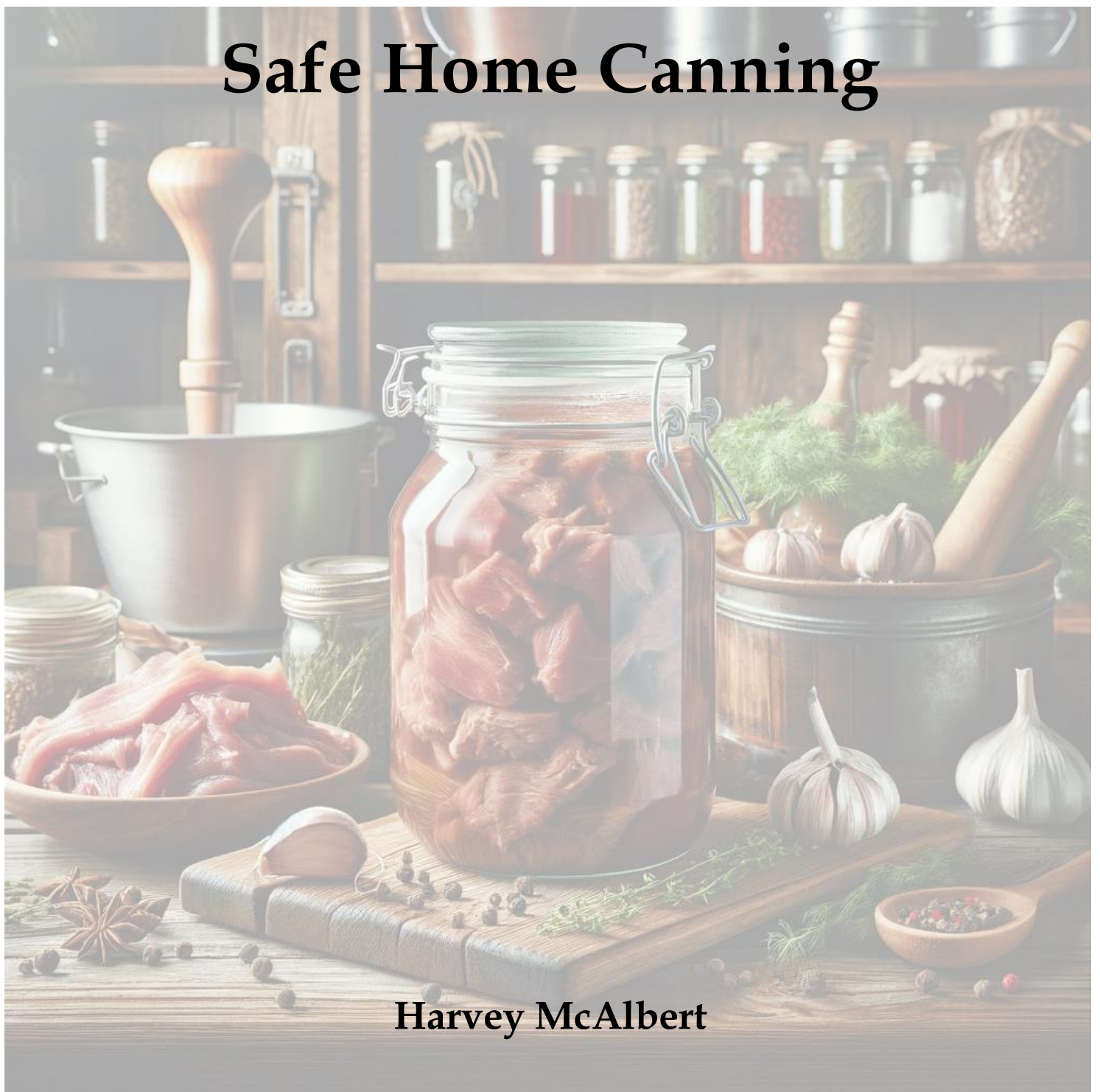


Safe Home Canning



Harvey McAlbert

CANNING SAFETY CHECKLIST

This checklist is designed to ensure a safe and successful canning experience, especially for beginners. It covers everything from preparing your workspace to handling the final product.

Before You Start

1. **Inspect Your Equipment:**

- Check pressure canner gauges for accuracy (especially if using a dial-gauge canner).
- Ensure the canner's vent pipes are clear and unobstructed.
- Examine the gasket or sealing ring for cracks or wear.
- Look over jars for nicks, cracks, or rough edges. Discard any that are damaged.
- Ensure lids and rings are in good condition; lids should be new for each canning session.

2. **Understand Your Recipe:**

- Read through the entire recipe and instructions before starting.
- Make sure you have all the ingredients and understand each step.

3. **Prepare Your Workspace:**

- Clean and sanitize all work surfaces, utensils, and canning tools.
- Organize ingredients and equipment for easy access.

During Canning

1. **Follow Recipe and Processing Times:**

- Stick to the recipe, especially the recommended headspace and processing times.
- Adjust processing times for your altitude, if necessary.

2. **Monitor Pressure and Temperature:**

- Keep a constant watch on your pressure canner to maintain the correct pressure.
- Use a timer to track processing times accurately.

3. **Practice Cleanliness:**

- Regularly wash your hands and keep surfaces clean.
- Avoid cross-contamination between raw and cooked foods.

After Processing

1. **Handling Jars:**

- Use a jar lifter to remove hot jars from the canner.
- Place them on a towel or wooden surface to cool, away from drafts.
- Do not tighten bands after processing; let the jars seal as they cool.

2. **Check Seals:**

- After 16-24 hours, check that the lids have sealed properly (they should not flex when pressed).
- Label and date your jars.

3. **Storage:**

- Store in a cool, dark, and dry place.
- Check regularly for any signs of spoilage.

4. **Handling Spoilage:**

- If a jar didn't seal properly, refrigerate and use within a couple of days.
- Discard any canned goods that show signs of spoilage or have an off-odor.

SAFETY TIPS FOR USING A PRESSURE CANNER

Using a pressure canner can be intimidating for beginners, but with the right knowledge and precautions, it can be a safe and effective tool for canning meat. Here are essential safety tips to keep in mind:

1. **Read the Manual:** before using your pressure canner for the first time, thoroughly read the manufacturer's manual. Each model may have specific operating instructions and safety features.
2. **Inspect Before Use:** check the canner, lid, and rubber gasket for any signs of wear or damage. Ensure the vent pipes are clear and not clogged.
3. **Use Proper Equipment:** only use jars and lids designed for pressure canning. Regular glass jars or non-canning lids may not withstand the pressure and could break.
4. **Ensure Even Heat Distribution:** when using a pressure canner on a stovetop, ensure it's centered over the heat source. Uneven heating could result in improperly processed food.
5. **Don't Overfill the Canner:** follow the manufacturer's guidelines on filling the canner. Overfilling can affect heat distribution and pressure levels.
6. **Monitor Pressure Closely:** once the canner is on the stove, monitor the pressure gauge or weight closely. Adjust the heat to maintain a steady pressure as recommended in your canning recipe.
7. **Vent Steam Before Sealing:** allow the canner to vent steam for 10 minutes before placing the weight or closing the vent. This step is crucial to remove air and build the correct pressure inside.
8. **Never Force Open the Lid:** after processing, turn off the heat and wait for the canner to cool and depressurize naturally. Never try to open the lid while it's still pressurized.
9. **Use Jar Lifters for Safety:** when removing jars from the canner, always use jar lifters to protect your hands from burns.
10. **Regular Maintenance:** if using a dial-gauge pressure canner, have the gauge tested annually for accuracy. Replace the gasket or sealing ring as needed according to the manufacturer's instructions.
11. **Keep Children and Pets Away:** during the canning process, keep children and pets away from the pressure canner to avoid accidents.
12. **Store Properly:** after use and cleaning, store the pressure canner with the lid upside down or off the pot to protect the gasket.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CLEANING AND STERILIZATION

Ensuring that your canning equipment, especially jars and lids, are clean and sterile is crucial for the safety and success of your canning process. Here are the best practices for cleaning and sterilization:

1. **Wash Your Jars and Lids Before Use:** even if they are new, wash jars and lids thoroughly with hot, soapy water. Rinse them well to remove any soap residue.
2. **Sterilize Jars Before Canning:** although washing is important, sterilization is key. You can sterilize jars in a few different ways:
 - **Boiling:** submerge jars in a large pot of water and bring it to a boil. Boil for at least 10 minutes. Increase the time for higher altitudes.
 - **Oven:** place clean jars on a baking sheet and put them in an oven at 225°F (about 110°C) for at least 20 minutes.
 - **Dishwasher:** use a dishwasher with a "sterilize" setting. Leave the jars in the dishwasher until ready to use.
3. **Do Not Sterilize Lids in Boiling Water:** modern canning lids (especially the sealing compound) can be adversely affected by boiling. Wash them with warm, soapy water, and rinse well. Keep them warm until use, but boiling is not necessary.
4. **Use Proper Utensils for Handling Sterile Equipment:** when handling sterilized jars and lids, use clean tongs or a jar lifter. Avoid touching the inside of the jars or the underside of the lids.
5. **Keep Equipment Warm:** after sterilizing, keep jars and lids warm (not hot) until they are filled with food. This prevents jars from breaking when hot food is added and maintains the sterility.
6. **Clean and Inspect Equipment Post-Canning:** after each canning session, clean your canner, jars, tools, and work area. Inspect tools for any damage or wear.
7. **Use Appropriate Cleaners for Tough Residues:** for tough residues, like mineral deposits from water, use a mixture of vinegar and water. Avoid using abrasive cleaners or pads that can scratch jars.
8. **Air-Dry All Equipment After Washing:** allow all your canning equipment to air dry completely before storing. This prevents mold and mildew growth.
9. **Store Equipment in a Clean, Dry Place:** store your sterilized and dried jars, lids, and canning tools in a clean, dry place. Covering jars with a clean cloth can keep them dust-free.
10. **Regularly Replace Worn Out Equipment:** regularly inspect and replace any canning equipment that shows signs of wear, like rusty bands or cracked jars.