

# JUDGING PRESERVED FOODS

## SAFETY

Safety is the primary consideration when judging preserved foods. Attractiveness of the product is secondary.

Each jar of canned food must be labeled with the processing time and method so it is possible to determine if the food is safely processed. The criterion for producing safe food is use of the proper processing method and time recommended by USDA and WSU. Use the USDA and WSU Cooperative Extension food preservation bulletins to make decisions about safety.

Disqualify entries that are not safely processed. This is particularly important for low acid foods such as vegetables, meat, fish, and poultry. If you find a safety problem, inform the contestant that the product was not safely processed, and be sure the contestant receives instruction about safe food preservation techniques. Do not disqualify foods for reasons other than safety.

*Low Acid Foods:* Low acid foods must be pressure canned. They must also be cut and packed

in the jars in the manner specified in the USDA and WSU Cooperative Extension bulletins. Some low acid foods (fish, mushrooms, cream style corn, chili peppers) cannot be safely canned in quart jars.

*High Acid Foods:* Fruits may be processed in a boiling water canner or a pressure canner. Jellies, jams, preserves, and fruit butters must be processed in a boiling water bath. Pickles may be processed by either the pasteurization method (at 180°F.) or in a boiling water bath. A hot pack with no further processing (open kettle canning) is not allowed for any foods. Jellies, jams, preserves, and fruit butters cannot be safely sealed with paraffin.

Our goal is to teach people that safe food preservation can be fun, economical, and personally satisfying. We want them to understand the basics of food safety and to follow approved methods of food preservation. As you judge the exhibits, be as positive as possible in your comments so that the exhibitor feels successful as a home food preserver.

## QUALITY

### Fruits and Vegetables

Unblemished fruits and vegetables of uniform maturity, size, and shape yield high quality canned products.

High quality fruits and vegetables are packed with the correct head space and covered with liquid.

Factors that lower the quality of canned fruits and vegetables:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Causes</b>
Blemishes and bruises	Overripe Improperly handled before processing
Discolored fruits or vegetables	Overprocessed Inadequate liquid to cover food Poor variety for canning
Floating fruit*	Packed too loosely Heavy syrup Overripe
Fruit or vegetable does not hold shape	Overripe Overprocessed
Cloudy liquid	Overripe vegetables May be indication of spoilage
Loss of liquid during processing	Water in boiling water bath was below top of jars Pressure in pressure canner changed too quickly

\* Floating does not diminish the quality of canned berries.

### Meat, Fish, and Poultry

High quality canned meats, fish, and poultry have the natural color of the cooked product, the pieces are somewhat uniform and sized for serving, and excess fat has been removed. Jelly or liquid need not cover the product entirely.

Factors that lower the quality of canned meats, fish, and poultry:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Cause</b>
Discolored product	Poor quality product before canning

### Jellied Products

High quality jellies are transparent with a color and flavor characteristic of the fruit. They are tender enough to cut easily with a spoon, and firm enough to retain their shape when removed from the jar.

High quality jams, preserves, conserves, and butters have flavors and colors distinctive of the ingredients and a spreadable consistency.

Factors that lower the quality of jellied products:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Causes</b>
Failure to gel	Inaccurate measuring Poor recipe Not enough acid or pectin in fruit Overcooked
Crystallization	Too much sugar Not enough acid Overcooked
Weepiness	Too much acid Storage place too warm
Fermented or mold formation	Glasses not well sterilized Inadequate seal

## QUALITY

### Pickles

High quality pickled foods contain adequate acid to keep the pickles from spoiling and have a crisp, firm texture and a pungent flavor.

Factors that lower the quality of pickles:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Causes</b>
Hollow pickles	Holding too long before brining Overmature or poorly developed vegetables Temperature too hot during fermentation
Dark pickles	Ground spices or too much spice Minerals from hard water, especially iron
Shriveled pickles	Too strong a salt, sugar or vinegar solution at the beginning of the pickling process Holding too long before brining
Soft pickles	Too little salt or acid Cucumbers did not have blossom end removed Insufficient brine to cover pickles Cucumbers were not pickling variety
Cloudy liquid or white sediment in bottom of jar	Anticaking ingredient in salt Yeasts have grown during pickle fermentation

### Dried Foods

Fresh, fully ripened foods produce high quality dried foods. Removing sufficient moisture prevents spoiling.

The moisture content of home dried fruits should be about 15–20%. The texture should be chewy and leather-like with no moisture pockets.

Many fruits retain their natural color better if they are pretreated with sulfur. However, do not mark down a dried fruit that has not been sulfured since some persons are allergic to sulfur.

Dried vegetables usually have 5–10% moisture and are crisp or brittle when properly dried. For best quality, almost all vegetables should be pretreated before drying.

Meat jerky is sufficiently dried when a cooled piece will crack without breaking in two when it is bent. Lean meat with little connective tissue makes the highest quality jerky.

All dried foods must be packaged in clean, dry, insect-proof containers that will not allow the reabsorption of moisture.


Factors that lower the quality of dried foods:

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Causes</b>
Poor color and flavor	Immature fruit or vegetable
Tough, fibrous, soft, or mushy dried food	Overmature fruit or vegetable Meat used for jerky contained too much connective tissue
Mold growth on dried food	Food not sufficiently dried Packaging not vapor-proof
Dried fruit is tough, brittle	Too much moisture removed

Preserving foods is fun and practical. These exhibits help teach correct food preservation techniques and interest other people in preserving food. Exhibits and judging show the importance of using high quality foods and the research-tested methods found in Cooperative Extension publications.

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