

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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With rising food costs, the interest in canning food at home is also rising. Over one hundred people stopped by the demonstrations of home canning in just 2 days at the State Fair recently. Some had never done it, some remembered mothers or grandmothers canning, and a few had all ready tried it themselves. But all were interested in getting more information.

Some stayed to examine the pressure canner and watch how it operated. Some wanted advice on what kind of canner to buy, or where to find one. Some just wanted to know how long it takes. That depends on the food you're canning and the size of the jars you use. Some wanted reassurance that what they'd all ready done was okay. In most cases it was. But there were a few who had to be told to go home and put the stuff down the toilet!

Very few had any idea that the bacteria in home canned food could be such serious stuff. The bacteria is *C. botulinum*, or the bug that causes botulism. The reason why it's a concern in canned foods is that this bacteria only lives where there is no air! When we put food in a jar or can, seal it up and heat it to drive out the air, we are creating the ideal home for botulism bacteria to grow. Ugh!

Luckily, this bacteria has another very picky requirement for growth. It does not like acid at all. It won't grow if there's enough acid around it. So, foods that naturally have enough acid are safe from botulism poisoning. These foods include fruits, jams

and jellies made from fruit, and pickles - either with added vinegar or fermented to make their own acid. These foods can be canned using boiling water.

Tomatoes are right on the line between enough and not enough acid. Not just the 'low acid' tomatoes are low in acid. It depends on how ripe they are, where they were grown, what the weather was like before they were picked as well as the variety. So for safety's sake, USDA recommends that ALL tomatoes get some added acid for canning. Putting a tablespoon of lemon juice in each pint jar is enough to keep the botulism bacteria from growing. Boiling water canning is enough processing.

All other foods, the vegetables as well as meats and seafood, don't have enough acid. The only way these are safely home canned is by putting them in a pressure canner. There, at 10 pounds of pressure, the temperature goes up to 240° F. How long it needs to stay that hot depends on the food and the size of the jar. But it will be enough to kill the botulism bacteria if the right time is used.

So back to the people who were told to throw their food down the toilet. The illness that *C. botulinum* causes is not your usual, run of the mill food poisoning. There's usually no diarrhea or vomiting, no cramps. This bacteria produces a toxin that paralyzes our nerves. It starts at the top of the head and works its way down the spine. First our face is affected, we can't focus our eyes. Then we can't speak clearly. If we don't get to a doctor for anti-toxin and the paralysis gets to our lungs or our heart, that's the end. Boiling the food won't destroy the toxin. Destroy the food.

So, if you're interested in preserving your food at home, please, do it safely! Call or come to our office in Seffner for tested canning instructions. If you follow them your food will be safe and keep for years, decades even if you don't eat it all first!

Here's a pasta dinner that can use canned, frozen or fresh vegetables. With canned or frozen all you do is mix, heat and serve. Use a pint jar of home canned for each can of commercial vegetable. If you use fresh, simmer until they're tender, then thicken. It's quick, colorful, delicious and nutritious. Enjoy!

Vegetable Pasta Dinner

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| 2 C uncooked penne or medium tube pasta | 1 cup canned or frozen carrots, drained |
| 2 14.5-oz cans stewed tomatoes | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| 1 15-oz can green beans, drained (2 C frozen) | 1 Tbsp oil |
| 1 Tbsp Italian seasoning | 3 Tbsp cornstarch |
| 1/4 C cold water | 1 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley |

Cook pasta according to directions on package. Drain. Heat oil in large skillet. Cook garlic until tender. Add carrots, tomatoes, beans and seasoning. Heat until simmering. Combine cornstarch and water in small bowl until smooth. Gradually stir into vegetable pan, stirring continuously until thickened. Stir in drained pasta. Sprinkle with parsley, and grated Parmesan cheese if desired. Serve hot. Serves 6-8.

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