

Canning Terms

Canning jars: Glass jars designed to withstand the heat and pressure of canning. They come in 1/2-pint, pint, quart, and 1/2-gallon sizes, although the first three are the most common. Jars come with *regular* or *wide mouth* openings and will be labeled accordingly. Lids and rings should match the type of jar being used. Regular jars work fine for most purposes, but when canning apple, pear, or peach halves the wide mouth jars are easier to fill. Jar breakage and poor seals can be avoided by checking jars before use for cracks and uneven or chipped rims. Discard defective jars.

Lids and rings: Canning lids (or “flats”) come with a gasket compound applied to the underside of the lid, which forms a seal in contact with the jar rim. Rings screw onto the jar, holding the lid in place until a seal is formed. The rings can be left on jars during storage or removed to use repeatedly, but the lids can only be used once.

Headspace: Space is allowed between the food and lid to provide room for expansion of the food as it is heated and for the development of the necessary vacuum as it cools. Too much or too little headspace may interfere with a proper seal. The recommended space for canned fruits is 1/2 inch, while for jams and jellies it is 1/4 inch.

Seal: As the food in the jar cools, a vacuum is formed, pulling the lid down and forming a seal. After at least 12 hours of undisturbed cooling and sealing time has elapsed, the lid can be checked for a proper seal. Do this by gently tapping on the center of the lid. A sealed lid will not move and will have a dull sound. A lid that has not properly sealed will have a sharper “tinking” sound, and movement of the lid center can be easily detected, revealing the absence of a vacuum in the jar. In my experience, jars which cannot definitely be identified as having a good seal will generally become unsealed within a few days.

Ascorbic acid: A naturally occurring substance found in some fruits and vegetables and commonly referred to as Vitamin C. The addition of ascorbic acid to fruits such as apples, pears, and peaches prevents an enzyme in these