

The
**AMISH
CANNING
COOKBOOK**

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THE AMISH CANNING COOKBOOK

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To my family—
Who would have thought that all those hours I spent in the kitchen
attempting to assuage your prodigious hunger pangs would lead to this?
I love being your mom!



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ALL ABOUT
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INTRODUCTION

Many of us today are choosing to go back to basics by simplifying our lives and concentrating on making our homes restful and joyful havens from the distractions and cares of fast-paced modern living. As we look for ways to accomplish this, we often turn to the tried and true methods of our forebears. Their self-reliance and knowledge of how to care for their families give us plenty of tools for creating a successful homemade life for ourselves and our loved ones. But unlike them, we are free to pick and choose what is meaningful for our particular situations and interests, and we can decide which of these new-found skills would have significance for our families. Learning to can our own food is one of the foundations of this chosen lifestyle.

Canning has been in existence for some two hundred years, and for much of that time, homemakers needed to preserve their harvest in order to feed their families during the lean winter months when gardens were bare. But with the advent of grocery stores and inexpensive canned food readily available anytime during the year, home canning fell by the wayside. However, the last several years have seen a resurgence in its popularity, and canning has once again taken center stage. With this resurgence comes the need for up-to-date canning instructions that take into account the very latest in safety guidelines—this is not the place to haul out your grandmother’s old canning “receipts” or even to refer to books written in the 1970s (the last time canning enjoyed a revival as a result of the “back to the land” movement).

Whether you are new to canning or have been putting up food for many years now, *The Amish Canning Cookbook* will find a place in your kitchen. In this book, you'll find recipes for almost any food, and whatever piques your canning interests can likely be satisfied within these pages. And you can trust that these recipes offer you the most up-to-date data available. You won't find anything fancy here, but you will find recipes guaranteed to please your family. This is good, wholesome fare that can be the start of many tasty meals, and even the pickiest eaters will enjoy the fruits of your efforts. Plus, seeing all those jars lining your pantry shelves is pure pleasure. I like to think the food tastes better than store-bought, which it likely does because you have been able to exercise control over such things as freshness and quality—but I also fancy that it tastes better because it was made with love.

Canning as a Way of Life

As far back as I can remember I have memories of helping my mother make jelly. In those days, we would ladle the hot jelly into any jars we could lay our hands on and then pour a thin layer of melted paraffin wax over the top to seal them.

The years passed and when I was preparing to get married, my gift list included everything I could possibly need to process food in my own home. In fact, one of my favorite gifts was an All-American pressure canner and several cases of jars. I was set, and it didn't take long before I began canning in earnest.

In my first year of married life, I remember canning 25 quarts of tomato sauce, which seemed like a staggering amount of food to me. I loved to open up my pantry door and just gaze at all those quarts of tomatoey goodness—it made me feel rich because I knew that come what may, I could feed my little family. But when the next harvest season came around, I had well over half of those jars still sitting there. I found it hard at first to actually *use* the food I'd taken the time to produce. I quickly realized that if I wasn't going to use the food I took such pains to process, it wouldn't benefit my family, and worse, we would be throwing away our money. So when the next season came around, I canned more tomato sauce, some peaches, green beans, and stew, and I made two batches of jelly—grape jelly using purchased grape juice (easy!) and strawberry jam—and I vowed to use every bit of it over the winter. We did, and some weeks our food budget was noticeably less. I realized I was onto something good.

As my family grew, so did my yearly canning count. Before long, I was annually canning many hundreds of jars of food—everything from my beloved tomato sauce and jelly to dried beans, meat, tuna and salmon, soups and stews, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. In the fall I could look at my pantry shelves absolutely brimming with the fruits of my efforts and be confident that, though the winter storms might blow, my family would be fed. And even more happily, I knew exactly what was in those jars—healthy, organic, and preservative-free food.

Moving to the country and adding a large garden, berry bushes and vines, and a few fruit trees gave me even more opportunities to feed my family with what we produced. During this time, we attended a Conservative Mennonite church, and canning was simply a way of life for the women of the church. I learned a lot from those ladies. We often discussed what we were currently putting up, and sometimes whole groups would meet at the local produce fields to pick. My twin sister, too, canned food from her garden, and she and I loved to share our excess—her pears and cherries in exchange for my blueberries, for instance.

We also raised our own meat, and to this day I can't eat turkey without boiling up the carcass afterward and canning a load of turkey and broth. Getting up to seven quarts of turkey and broth from a carcass that most people throw away means I've taken advantage of every last part of the bird, and suddenly it's a cheap cut of meat. I love that.

By 1999, I had been canning for more than 20 years, and I decided to become a certified master food preserver through our local university extension service. Even though I knew a lot about canning food and had pretty much “canned it all,” it was a great learning experience for me, and I loved being able to give back to my community through outreach programs, the telephone hotline, and classes. Probably the best part of becoming certified was that I became more aware of safety issues and best practices, and I developed the habit of maintaining up-to-date knowledge of the latest studies coming out of government and university research programs. Over the years I've had to “retire” or rework some old-time favorite recipes, but for me that's such a small price to pay for the confidence that when I open one of my home-canned jars of food to nourish a grandchild, I know they are eating safe, healthy, natural food with nothing in it but what comes from God's bounty.

How to Fit Canning into Your Busy Life

For many years I was a stay-at-home wife and mother, so living a “from scratch” life fit fairly easily within my daily routine. But I want to encourage you that even though you might work away from home part- or full-time, you can find the time to avail yourself of these same joys. It requires making choices based on your desires and being willing to give up certain things in order to gain something better.

Life has many twists and turns for most of us, and I am not immune. When many of my contemporaries are beginning to wind down their careers and think about retirement, I seem to be busier than ever. I currently work full-time and freelance regularly on the side. In the last several years I have also been fortunate enough to find an audience for my books, but the hours necessary to produce a manuscript can't be foreshortened. I own my home and live alone, which means that I'm responsible for cleaning and maintaining it, including my yards and a small flock of chickens. And then there are my family, church, and friends, all of whom I care about and want to visit regularly. And let's not forget hobbies and interests. It's a long list that occupies my time and energies—and, I'm sure, yours as well.

Even so, I have canned more than 300 jars of food this year so far.

Why on earth, you may be asking, would I want to add to an already busy schedule by canning food that's so easily purchased at the store? Here are some of my reasons:

- Canning saves money, especially when I grow many of my own fruits and vegetables (the cost of seed packets is so minimal compared to the quantity of food produced—it's a great deal!). Yes, that means I must plant, tend, and harvest a garden, but when I'm busy outside, I'm not as tempted to run into town to pick up a few items, only to come home with more than I went for.
- When I'm in the kitchen working on my latest canning project, I often contemplate my life and relationships and pray for the needs of those whom I love. I'm a “captive audience” and find I don't get so easily distracted because I'm in one place, doing one thing. I think it's easy to feel close to God while working with His bounty, and I know that there are

many times when, as I'm cutting and chopping, God is working in my heart, and my worries and fears tend to melt away.

- By spending extra time in the kitchen during the harvest season, I'm actually getting a leg up on meal planning for the coming months. When I'm extra tired after a long day—often in winter when the days are short, cold, and dreary and the nights are long—I can simply come home, grab a jar or two from my shelves, and have dinner in a jiffy. And as a bonus, any leftovers become lunch the next day. Tasty convenience!
- Speaking of lunches, I'm not tempted to go out for lunch on those mornings when I'm getting ready for work and suddenly remember that I forgot to plan for the day's meal. Instead, I can grab a jar of soup or stew and heat that up instead of getting fast food or some other less healthy or more expensive choice.
- Canning produces a self-reliant streak. Even if we were to experience an extended power outage, I could still feed my family. And if I found myself in a worst-case scenario, I could take care of my family for as long as needed by canning on my outdoor propane stove or even over an open fire. That's food confidence you can't buy in a grocery store.
- I never add preservatives or additives to my home-canned food. It's just good, plain, nutritious food inside those jars.
- I don't have to worry about BPA leaching into my food because I don't use cans.
- My home-canned food tastes better than store-bought. And because I'm the cook as well as the canner, I can tweak the ingredients and seasonings to please my palate.
- I'm free to concentrate on storing more of the foods my family enjoys. For instance, we really enjoy canned peaches. And while I can't seem to find organic canned peaches at my local grocery store, I *can* get organic fresh peaches in season. Putting up several canner loads each summer means my family gets to eat something they love, and I have the satisfaction of knowing they're eating food that's organic and pure.

- Canning is easier on the environment than filling my cupboards with store-bought canned food. By canning my own food, I don't contribute to wasteful packaging and transportation costs. And because I use my jars again and again, it's less wasteful.
- Unexpected guests? No problem. I can always go to my shelves and make a meal in a hurry.
- Home-canned foods make great gifts.
- I experience personal satisfaction, knowing that by the work of my hands, my family is fed.
- Canning is enjoyable! I consider it a form of entertainment, and instead of spending money for that entertainment (like for movies, concerts, athletic events, etc.), I like to think I'm *making* money instead.

We are so fortunate to live in these times, where we can rest assured that proper canning practices can virtually guarantee that our families eat safely processed food. And because of this, we can take advantage of seasonal gluts of home-grown produce or great sales at our local grocery stores or farmers' markets to put food on our tables. Yes, canning is an old-time homemaker's skill, but it fits perfectly in the modern kitchen as well. I hope you give it a try. You may find that it's not simply a passing fancy, and that preserving jars of delicious food fits well in your routine. I firmly believe that you and your loved ones will be the glad beneficiaries.

ALL ABOUT CANNING

1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CANNING

When we think of home canning, our mind's eye is quick to envision neat rows of jars lining pantry shelves, safely filled with food just waiting to be opened so we can prepare a variety of tasty meals for our dear families. From the excess of summer gardens come the ingredients for many appetizing feasts during the cold winter months. Let those winter storms blow in—we have the satisfaction of knowing that our families will be well nourished because our pantry shelves are filled with a bit of summer's abundance.

Canning our own food seems the epitome of the industrious homemaker, but canning did not begin as an answer to the housewife's problem of what to have for dinner. Instead, canning was developed as an answer to a question posed by war. In the late 1700s, Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France was concerned that his soldiers were not being fed well when they traveled long distances from home, and he realized that they needed a reliable method for keeping food safe to eat for long periods. So he offered a cash prize to the person who could develop a dependable method of food preservation.

Enter Nicolas Appert, a French candy maker, brewer, distiller, and chef. Appert discovered that when heat was applied to food in sealed glass bottles, the food was preserved. In the early 1800s, the French navy successfully experimented with foods preserved by heat on their long voyages. They ate preserved meat, vegetables, fruit, and milk. But it would take more than 50 years to provide the reason for *why* the canning process worked. Finally, Louis Pasteur demonstrated that the growth of microorganisms causes food spoilage,

and that sealing food into jars or cans using high heat kills these microorganisms, thus rendering the canned food safe to eat months, and even years, later.

Several years after Appert's discovery, an Englishman by the name of Peter Durand figured out how to successfully seal food in tin-coated iron cans, and in 1813 the first commercial canning factory was established in England. These cans of food were very expensive, and a person needed a chisel and hammer to open the container, but even so, the food canning industry was launched. Canned food was largely used by the military and explorers, and it wasn't until the 1920s that home canning caught on with homemakers.

In 1858, a Philadelphia tinsmith named John Mason patented a glass "fruit jar," which incorporated threads at the jar's top along with matching threads on a metal band that was screwed down on top of a zinc lid with a rubber gasket. For the first time, a canning jar system was easy to use and within reach of even modest budgets. Then in 1882, the Lightning jar was introduced. These glass jars had glass lids that used metal clamps to hold the lid and a rubber gasket in place. Atlas jars also used this system. In fact, the Lightning-type jar system was manufactured in the United States until the 1960s, and European companies still manufacture these jars (Weck and Leifheit are two such companies). They are very beautiful jars that come in many shapes and sizes.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Ball jars (1886) and Kerr jars (1903) began being made with the two-piece rings and lids we are used to seeing today. The metal lid came with a permanently attached gasket that sealed the food inside the jars. The companies were eventually combined, and today the Jarden Corporation manufactures and sells Ball, Kerr, Bernardin (sold mostly in Canada), and Golden Harvest jars.

One other development of note occurred in 1976 when Stieg Tattler reusable lids went on the market. During the

Notes:

1960s and 1970s, at the height of the “back to the land” movement, there was such a resurgence of interest in home canning that jars and lids were often hard to come by, and the introduction of Tattler reusables was a direct result of this dearth. Tattler lids are made from a dense plastic compound that is BPA-free. A reusable rubber ring or gasket makes the seal. Tattler lids and rubber rings have been shown to last twenty years or more, and often after many years of use, the only replacements needed are the rubber rings.

Even though the canning process itself has changed little over the last two hundred years, research and trials led by universities and government agencies have honed the safety guidelines for specific foods being canned, and these are constantly being updated as needed. So even though you may have a recipe that has been handed down from your beloved grandmother or aunt, it’s best to rely on the most up-to-date data available. You can probably still use that old-time favorite recipe, but you may need to change the processing time or method. For the sake of your family’s safety, you’ll be well advised to do so.