



Tips for the first-time home canner

My mother-in-law gave me her pressure canner, and I'm hoping to do some canning for the first time this year. How should I prepare?

One of the best resources for beginner and experienced canners alike is the National Center for Home Food Preservation, hosted by the University of Georgia, <http://nchfp.uga.edu>.

The site offers free access to many reliable sources of canning information, including the ability to download the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Complete Guide to Home Canning. (Note: You can also purchase a spiral-bound printed version of the USDA guide for \$18 from the Education Store of Purdue Extension, <https://mdc.itap.purdue.edu/>.)

Ohio State University Extension also offers food preservation information: go to <http://ohioline.osu.edu>, click on "Food," and click on "Food Preservation" for a series of fact sheets. You'll probably want to start with the four-page Canning Basics, which includes other recommended books for canning. Classes are also available; check out one near you: <http://go.osu.edu/fdpreserv>.

As you gather materials and start doing some homework, there are a few other things you can do to make sure you're all set when your garden bounty is ready for preserving:

- Get the dial gauge on the pressure canner tested to make sure it's giving an accurate reading. Check with your local Extension office for information about this service. If the gauge reads

high or low by more than 2 pounds at 5, 10 or 15 pounds per square inch (psi), you'll need to have it replaced.

- It would be helpful to read the manual that came with the canner. If you don't have it, you might be able to find it online, or you can try to contact the manufacturer for a copy.

- Make sure you have all the equipment you'll need for canning. You didn't mention if you also received the accessories you may need, such as a jar lifter, a bubble freer or a funnel with an extra-wide mouth. You might also want to stock up now on jars and lids.

- Find out what your altitude is. At more than 1,000 feet above sea level, water boils at a lower temperature, which means your canning process may not kill all bacteria if you don't follow instructions for high-altitude canning. Some people are surprised that even Midwest states like Ohio have areas above 1,000 feet. There are plenty of smartphone apps that can tell you the altitude at your location, or you can inquire at your local Extension office or Soil Conservation Service. Or, go to the U.S. Geological Survey's website at <http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic> and click the menus for your state and county for a list of elevations at various locations in your area.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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