Getting Ready for Food Preservation Season  
*By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist*

The spring thaw brings thoughts of growing things and the hope of a bumper crop this year. Now before they are needed is the ideal time to get out the canning supplies, and make sure everything is ready.

Some supplies can be used year after year; others must not be. Mason-type jars are used for canning. They can be reused as long as they are still in good condition. Check jars for any cracks. Even a hairline crack can lead to food loss during the heating process of canning. Also check the rims for nicks. A sensitive finger, rubbed around the edge, may detect impurities that are not noticeable by sight. If jars are damaged, replace. Yard sales and auctions are an inexpensive way to increase or replenish the supply, but be sure to check them before using. Canning rings can also be reused as long as they are free from rust and dents. Flats (the other part of the recommended two-piece lids for canning), however, are only meant for a single use.

Canners themselves can often be found inexpensively at yard sales, estate sales or auctions. Before buying or canning with a used canner make sure it is safe to use. Make sure the metal itself is in good condition. A canner that is deeply pitted or cracked may not withstand the high temperature and/or pressure during canning. The canner handles should be present and secure so that they can hold the weight of a full canner if lifted. For a pressure canner, it should have safety features that allow excess pressure to vent such as a vent pipe or petcock. It should also have either a weighted or dial gauge.

The dial gauge of a pressure canner can, over time, become inaccurate and so not able to safely can food. Gauges should be tested annually before the canning season begins. This can be done at most University of Missouri Extension Offices. Also, I will be testing gauges and available to answer questions in person. Come to the Show-Me Resource Fair at the First Baptist Church in Cameron on March 28, 9-noon. Other dates are being planned for around the region for later in the spring. Food preservation classes are also being held around the region this spring/summer.

For more information on getting ready for food preservation season, where to get a pressure canner gauge tested or upcoming classes or any other topics, please contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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