

Now I've Done It...

"Now I've done it. There is no going back."

When you read a statement like this, something life changing has happened. For me, it was successfully water bath canning my first pasta sauce with fresh tomatoes. The taste is amazing and there is no going back to "store" pasta sauce.

For the past 2 weeks, I've been writing about my food preservation adventures. It started with a review of my resources, equipment and recipes. I was slightly delayed in the process when I realized I didn't have enough tomatoes and was missing a few helpful tools like a jar funnel. Luckily, our local farmers markets have abundant produce (and are still open through September).

Yes, food preservation requires commitment. However, practicing the process builds competence and confidence. If food is not preserved in some manner, it will spoil. Spoilage is caused by microorganisms, physical damage such as bruising, water loss or puncture or by chemical changes such as those caused by enzymes. Microorganisms are everywhere, in the air and soil, on people and animals and on surfaces of items. They grow well in moist conditions and can easily contaminate foods.

Canning is the process in which foods are placed in jars or cans and heated to a temperature that destroys microorganisms and inactivates enzymes. This heating and later cooling forms a vacuum seal. The vacuum seal prevents other microorganisms from recontaminating the food within the jar or can.

The cooling process can take 12-24 hours. My warning note was placed by my cooling jars so curious household members wouldn't disturb them (and disrupt the vacuum process).

If you're reading this article and remember your grandma's recipe that didn't require water bath or pressure processing, here's an update. There's a reason that K-State Research and Extension offers food preservation workshops and education. We know that incorrect, untested methods present a very real risk of botulism. (Reminder - botulism is a food borne illness that can be deadly). My grandma would have clipped this article and mailed it with a note: "There's no going back to my old recipe. It is not safe."

If you are interested in learning safe food preservation techniques, view the free "Field to Fork" webinars presented by North Dakota State University: <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/fieldtofork/webinars> or contact Cowley County Extension at 221-5450 or 441-4565.

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