Canning can be a safe and economical way to preserve quality food at home. Disregarding the value of your labor, canning homegrown food may save you half the cost of buying commercially canned food. Canning favorite and special products to be enjoyed by family and friends is a fulfilling experience and a source of pride for many people.

If vegetables are handled properly and canned promptly after harvest, they can be more nutritious than fresh produce sold in local stores.

Home-canned foods are a year-round treat. But if those foods are not canned safely, foodborne illness can turn a treat into tragedy. Use current canning methods and follow these tips to can foods safely.

The advantages of home canning are lost when you start with poor quality fresh foods; when jars fail to seal properly; when food spoils; and when flavors, texture, color, and nutrients deteriorate during prolonged storage.

10 Tips for Safe Home-Canned Food

1. **Altitude Adjustment**—Kansas altitude can range from below 1,000 feet to just over 4,000 feet. Failure to adjust for altitude will lead to underprocessed food, which encourages the growth of Clostridium botulinum. Recipes in the Ball Blue Book are written with processing instructions for altitudes below 1,000 feet.

2. **Headspace**—Proper headspace helps ensure a good vacuum seal on jars. Too little headspace can compromise the seal. Follow recommendations for headspace.

3. **Processing Equipment**—Processing methods are recommended for home canning are water bath canners for high-acid foods and pressure canners for low-acid foods. These are the only options you have.

4. **Untested or Homemade Recipes**—Canning your favorite recipe is risky, and may cause spoilage and foodborne illness.

5. **Acidifying Tomatoes**—Tomatoes are on the borderline between a low-acid and high-acid food. Tomato processing recommendations include both boiling water and pressure canning. Both methods require acidification. Acidification Options for Tomatoes (Choose One): Bottled Lemon Juice, Citric Acid or Vinegar.

6. **Improper Processing Time**—Use trusted resources for safe processing instructions.

7. **Lids and Jars**—Recipes specify what size of jar to use. If a recipe lists pints only, do not use a larger jar. Regular and wide-mouth Mason-type, threaded, home-canning jars with self-sealing lids are the best choice. Colored jars and lids are available and are safe for canning, but not recommended for fair exhibits. Commercial jars that cannot accommodate two-piece canning lids are not recommended for home canning.

8. **Modifying Tested Recipes**—Adding thickeners, pasta, rice, or any other ingredient to tested recipes can result in spoilage and foodborne illness. These changes alter the acidity and consistency, which slows heat penetration. Instead, make the recipe as stated, then add extra ingredients before serving.

9. **Fancy Pack**—These are not practical and produce potentially unsafe products. The slow process of fancy packing hot food will cool the food too much, resulting in underprocessing.

10. **New Appliances for Home Canning** are being manufactured to help consumers preserve food without a lot of expertise or in smaller batches. These appliances must be used according to their instructions and recipes. Use of recipes not developed for these appliances can lead to seal failure, food spoilage, and other potential health risks.