



JUDGING PRESERVED FOODS

Safe food preservation can be fun, economical and personally satisfying. Judging home-canned foods is an opportunity to teach people safe food preservation. As an exhibit judge, inform contestants if their product was not safely processed and be sure the contestant receives instruction about safe food preservation techniques. Be as positive as possible in your comments so that the exhibitor still feels successful as a home food preserver.

Safety should be the primary consideration when judging preserved foods. *Attractiveness of the product is secondary.* Each jar of canned food must be labeled with the processing time and method used. The criterion for producing safe food is use of publications from the USDA and the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service recommended processing method and time.

- ✓ Low-acid foods must be pressure canned.
- ✓ High-acid foods may be processed in a boiling water canner or a pressure canner.
- ✓ Paraffin should not be used to seal jams and jellies.
- ✓ Open kettle processing is not acceptable for any product.
- ✓ Only entries that are not safely processed should be disqualified.

Since we do not open canned foods in our state, we must rely on **visual inspection to judge characteristics such as flavor and texture.** Flavor of *fruits* is by *ripeness and*

appearance. Flavor of *vegetables* is usually indicated by *maturity* of the product and *overall appearance.* *Integrity or wholeness* of the product is a good indicator of texture.

Clear, clean standard jars and two-piece lids must be used. The proper size jar should be used since some low-acid foods such as fish, mushrooms, cream style corn, and chili peppers cannot be safely canned in quart jars.

There should be **no signs of spoilage**—such as gas bubbles, leaky seals, bad odor, or cloudy liquid.

The judge should test to see that the jar has a **seal** by pressing the middle of the lid with a finger. If the lid springs up when the finger is removed, the lid is not sealed. Or, when holding the jar at eye level and looking across the lid, a sealed lid should appear curved down in the center—not flat or bulging.

The appropriate **headspace** must be followed. Headspace is the unfilled space above the food in a jar and below its lid. Recommendations for headspace are:

- ❖ Jams & Jellies: ¼-inch
- ❖ Fruits*, Pickles & Tomatoes: ½-inch
- ❖ Vegetables*: 1-inch
- ❖ Meats, Seafood, Soups & Pie Fillings*: 1-inch
- ❖ Poultry: 1¼-inch

(*Check the recipe for the appropriate headspace to use. Apple juice, grape juice, and fruit puree only require ¼-inch headspace. Green tomato pie filling only requires ½-inch. Black-eyed peas processed in

quarts need 1¼-inch.

Judging preserved foods requires study, careful training, and good judgement.

Knowledge about food preservation and what various types of products should look like will assist you in choosing prizewinning entries.

Completing a **scorecard** for every entry would be ideal but when there are large numbers of entries, this would be too time consuming.

Becoming familiar with the criteria on the suggested scorecards will assist in making a mental score on individual entries.

Resources:

- University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, *So Easy To Preserve*, 1993.

- USDA *Guide to Home Canning*, Ag. Information Bulletin No. 539.

- Scorecards adapted from *Judging Preserved Foods*, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

**By Sandra Bastin, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.,
Extension Food & Nutrition Specialist**

C a n n e d F r u i t	
Characteristic	Points
Texture Firm, yet tender; characteristic of tree ripe but not overripe; edge of fruit smooth; free from dark places, peel pieces, or sediment of any kind; free of mushiness.	35
Uniformity Pieces of same size and shape; color characteristic of fruit and uniform throughout; no discoloration; syrup clear*.	30
Pack Good proportion of liquid to solids; liquid covers product to within ½-inch headspace; no floating fruit.	25
Container Standard pint or quart canning jar; clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace.	10
TOTAL POINTS	100
*Consistency of syrup may vary depending on ingredients and their proportions. Regardless of consistency, syrup should be sparkling clear. If fruit has caused the syrup to be colored, the color should be a natural color for the fruit. Artificial coloring is not allowed.	

C a n n e d V e g e t a b l e s

Characteristic	Points
<p>Maturity of Product Young and tender; prime stage of maturity; free of strings, fibers, large stems, cores, white streaks, or starchiness.</p>	30
<p>Pack Jars filled to appropriate headspace*; all space filled but not crowded; liquid covers product, is clear, and free of unnatural cloudiness; good proportion of liquid to solids; no sediment in bottom of jars and no foreign material such as stems, leaves, shucks, etc.</p>	20
<p>Uniformity Pieces uniform in size and shape; even color throughout; color characteristic of product; free of blemishes, bruises, and insect damage.</p>	20
<p>Texture Vegetables should hold their shape & not appear overcooked; no split beans or peas.</p>	20
<p>Container Standard pint or quart canning jar**; clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace.</p>	10
<p>TOTAL POINTS</p>	100
<p>*For vegetables, product and liquid should be filled to within 1-inch of the top of the jar. Starchy vegetables, like corn, shelled beans, and peas need 1¼-inches since they expand more during heating. **Cream-style corn should only be canned in pints; mushrooms and peppers in ½-pints or pints.</p>	

F r u i t J u i c e s & J e l l i e s	
Characteristic	Points
Clearness Free from sediment, pulp, crystals, etc.	30
Consistency <i>Juice:</i> Flows freely, neither too thick or too watery. <i>Jelly:</i> Firm but tender, not sticky, gummy or syrupy; should hold shape but quiver slightly when jar is turned.	30
Appearance Attractive and characteristic of fruit; clear, sparkling, not dull.	25
Container Clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace. <i>Juice:</i> Standard canning jar <i>Jelly:</i> Standard ½-pint or pint canning jars.	15
TOTAL POINTS	100

O t h e r S w e e t S p r e a d s	
Characteristic	Points
Clearness Liquid should be clear but characteristic of fruit; free of sediment, defects, etc.; fruit in uniform pieces appropriately sized for product; fruit transparent in appearance.	30
Consistency Liquid from consistency of honey to semi-jelly; pieces of fruit uniform, hold shape, appear tender and distributed uniformly throughout; good proportion of liquid and solids.	30
Color Characteristic of fruit; free of discoloration; syrup clear and free of sediment.	25
Container Standard ½-pint or pint canning jars, clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace.	15
TOTAL POINTS	100

Pickled & Fermented Foods

Characteristic	Points
Texture	40
Color Even throughout and characteristic of product; fruit pickles bright in color; no artificial color added.	25
Uniformity Pieces of same size and shape; not ground or chopped too finely; no ragged edges; liquid clear and free of sediment or defects of any kind; good proportion of liquid to pickles; presence of reasonable amount of spice acceptable; no floating pieces.	20
Container Standard pint or quart canning jar; clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace.	15
TOTAL POINTS	100

Meats, Poultry Fish & Game	
Characteristic	Points
Pack Jar filled to within 1 to 1¼-inches of top; pieces of meat placed lengthwise in container; good proportion of meat and liquid.	20
Preparation of Meat Excess fat and gristle removed; meat not floured or fried.	20
Uniformity Pieces same size and shape; only one kind of meat in container; color characteristic of meat.	25
Liquid Meat may or may not be covered with liquid; liquid should be clear and may be slightly jellied; less than ½-inch fat on chicken and beef and ¼-inch on pork.	25
Container Standard canning jar, appropriate size for product; clear glass; clean; appropriate lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed.	10
TOTAL POINTS	100