



HOME CANNING

COSTS/BENEFITS ANALYSIS

According to the 1996 National Family Opinion Mail Survey performed by the Farnsworth Group for the Alltrista Consumer Products Company, 28 percent of households in the United States had home canned within the last two years. Of these households, 45 percent claim they home can more than once a year.

The typical home canner:

- ✓ is a white female;
- ✓ is over 50 years old;
- ✓ has a high school diploma;
- ✓ is not employed full time;
- ✓ spends \$10-15/year on canning supplies;
- ✓ has a household of 2 to 4 members;
- ✓ has an annual income of \$20,000-40,000;
- ✓ is more likely to live in the central regions of the U.S. than on the coast.

Over 60 percent of the respondents learned to can from their mothers. Of the 40 percent who did not learn from family members, 20 percent are self-taught through books and the other 20 percent learned from other sources.

The most commonly canned foods are jams and jellies. Meat is the least common. Tomato sauces are canned equally by beginning or veteran canners but salsa seems to be a trendy item for beginners.

The source of food for canning is their own garden for 58 percent of canners; 13 percent, from someone else's garden; and 10 percent from farmer's markets or roadside stands.

About 20 percent of all jars canned are given away as gifts. The following chart shows the canning preferences of beginning and veteran canners.

Food Canning Preferences		
<i>Food Products</i>	<i>Beginning Canners</i>	<i>Veteran Canners</i>
Jams/Jellies	54.5%	63.2%
Vegetables	39.4%	61.0%
Pickles	31.5%	40.0%
Fruits	26.1%	39.9%
Tomato Sauces	32.5%	34.2%
Salsas	23.6%	15.9%
Relishes	10.3%	16.4%
Meats	3.4%	6.8%
Other*	8.4%	12.5%
*Vegetable-based sauces, juices, non-vegetable sauces and oils.		

The number one reason people can is to preserve the produce from their own gardens. Gardeners feel since they've grown it, they don't want to waste it. The second reason for home canning is that they like the way home-produced food tastes. This gives them some control over what they eat as they know there are no preservatives, pesticides, or allergens in their home canned product. Personal satisfaction also rates highly as a motivator for home canning. Other reasons people home can are: economic considerations; gift giving; the ability to preserve a desired combination or variety of produce; shortage of freezer space; and because it is a family tradition.

Home canning takes time. If you attach a monetary value to your time, the cost of canning food at home will be about the same as buying the food at the grocery. But, if you have the time and can for any of the above reasons, we can figure the value of home canned foods without regard to labor.

According to a nationwide survey by the National Association for Gardening, a typical 600 square foot (30' by 20') garden will yield roughly one pound per square foot or 600 pounds of vegetables. Seeds, plants, fertilizer, pesticides, and small garden tools, amortized over five years, cost about \$60. **Based on these facts, the cost of raising vegetables is about 10¢ per pound.** If you purchase directly from growers or pick-your-own farms, always figure the price-per- pound so you can compare the cost of commercially canned or frozen vegetables.

Assuming that one pound of fresh vegetables will fill a pint jar (this amount will actually vary), **we can calculate the cost of canning.**

- ✍ amortize a pressure canner over 20 years and use it to can 200 pints per year;
- ✍ amortize jars over ten years;
- ✍ add the home-grown produce cost, jars, lids and the electricity or gas to operate the canner;
- ✍ the cost of home canning a pint of vegetables is about 20¢.

Purchasing regularly priced commercial-canned vegetables (14- to 16-ounces) will cost about 50 to 70¢ or more. Your home-canned vegetables at 20¢ per pint could represent at least a 60 percent savings. But if you purchase commercially-canned vegetables at the end of the season at 5/\$2, there may be no price difference.

When EFNEP figures the savings of fruits and vegetables that are home-canned, they estimate the amount of money saved compared to an estimate of what the product actually cost. For instance, pints of vegetables are valued at 38¢ and quarts at 76¢, while pints of fruits are valued at 78¢ and quarts at \$1.56.

Many factors complicate cost comparisons. A garden may not yield the typical amount because of inclement weather; quart jars may be more economical for a large family to use; or the freezer or canner may need repair. None of these factors were considered in deciding if home canning is worth the effort. Only you can make that decision based on your reasons for canning.



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