

# Using Preserved Foods Safely

## FROZEN FOODS

Microorganisms can start to grow as food thaws. Food should be thawed in the refrigerator to keep this growth at a minimum. Thawed food may be refrozen if ice crystals are still in the food. However, refreezing may change the quality of the food (texture, color, flavor). For information on refreezing food, see PNW 250 "You Can Prevent Food Poisoning."

## DRIED FOODS

Dried foods should be reconstituted in the refrigerator if longer than one to two hours are necessary for reconstitution. Any dried foods with signs of spoilage should be discarded.

## CANNED FOODS

EXAMINE all canned foods before using them.

1. Inspect the can or jar before opening.
  - a. Tin cans--Both ends should be flat or curved slightly inward. All seams should be tight with no trace of leakage.
  - b. Glass jars--Metal lids should be firm and flat or curved slightly inward. There should be no signs of leakage around the rubber ring or elsewhere.
2. As the can is opened, notice whether there is an inrush or an outrush of air. Spoilage is indicated when air rushes out or the liquid spurts.
3. Smell the contents at once. The odor should be characteristic of the food. An "off" odor probably means spoilage.
4. Check the food carefully to see that it appears to have a characteristic texture and color. The broth over canned meat and chicken may or may not be jelled. Liquids in all foods should be clear. Any change from the natural texture and color indicates spoilage. DO NOT TASTE ANY QUESTIONABLE FOODS.
5. Discard canned food with signs of spoilage. High acid food (such as fruit) may be discarded in the garbage can or in a garbage disposal. Spoiled low acid food (such as vegetables, meat, fish, and poultry) must be discarded more cautiously because it could contain botulinal toxin. Discard the spoiled food carefully using one of the following methods. Be careful not to contaminate your work area by spilling the food.
  - Dump down garbage disposal.
  - Flush down toilet.
  - Boil at full rolling boil for 20 minutes. Discard usual way.
  - Burn.
  - Bury deep in ground where animals will not contact it. (The toxin will gradually decompose.)

6. Any containers or utensils that come in contact with spoiled canned food should be carefully washed. Use soap and water to wash containers used for high acid foods. Containers that come into contact with low acid foods should be sterilized in one of the following ways:
  - Soak in weak sanitizing strength chlorine solution.
  - Wash in dishwasher.
  - Boil in water 15-20 minutes.

BOIL all low acid foods (meats, fish, poultry, vegetables) before eating as a safety precaution. Boiling destroys any botulinal toxin that might be present. To assure that every part of the food reaches the boiling temperature, use the following time guidelines:

- Most vegetables for 10 minutes at full rolling boil.
- Thick vegetables (like spinach, squash, and creamed corn) for 20 minutes at full boil.
- Meats, fish, and poultry for 15 minutes at full boil.

The following oven method for heating home-canned fish is suggested:

- Open the jar of fish and examine for spoilage. If spoilage is evident, discard the fish (without tasting) out of the reach of pets. Wash the lid before discarding or reusing it on the jar.
- Insert a meat thermometer upright into the center of the jar. The tip should be at the approximate center of the fish.
- Cover the jar loosely with foil and place in an oven preheated to 350° F. (180° C.).
- Remove the jar from the oven when the thermometer registers 185° F. (85° C.). About 30 to 35 minutes will be needed.
- Let the jar stand at room temperature for about 30 minutes. This will allow the temperature to become uniform throughout. By using a thermometer to determine the temperature of the fish, this heat treatment is equivalent to "boiling."
- Serve the fish hot or refrigerate immediately for later use.
- Note: Seafood used in a casserole dish baked at 350° F. (180° C.) may be baked as usual and the temperature checked at the end of the cooking as outlined above for jars.



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