

Safety Considerations for Gifts of Home-Canned Foods

Home-canned foods are thoughtful gifts during the holidays or anytime. But how do you know if the food product you received as a gift is safe to eat? Use these tips based on National Center for Home Food Preservation guidelines to evaluate the safety of home-canned gifts.

- Fruit jams and jellies and whole fruits like peaches and pears are low-risk because their natural acidity and high sugar content provide an extra measure of safety.
- Low-acid meats, vegetables and mixtures pose a higher risk, because, if improperly processed, they can support the growth of the botulism bacteria. These products must be prepared following tested recipes in a pressure canner.
- Mixtures of acidic and low-acid foods — such as salsas and some pickled products — are also a potential risk for botulism if they are not properly processed. Jar size is important to home-canned food safety, as well. For example, while you can safely can salsa in pint jars, you won't find any tested recipes for safely canning salsa in quart jars.
- Not everything that is made commercially can be safely canned at home. For example, there are no tested procedures for home canning the following products:
 - Pesto
 - Pumpkin butter or other vegetable-based butters
 - Cream soups
 - Hot fudge sauce
 - Canned breads and cakes
 - Herbs or vegetables in oil
 - Gifts canned in decorative untested jars

A sealed lid doesn't mean a product is safe. It is best when the gift giver uses recommended recipes, procedures and equipment. Ask a few kind questions, if necessary. Be gracious and thankful for the gift, but if there is any doubt about a product's safety — throw it out.

Source: Andress, Elizabeth L. 2010. "Be Safe Eating Your Homemade Gifts." National Center for Home Food Preservation. <https://nchfp.uga.edu/tips/winter/gifts.html>.