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Available for Immediate Release:

Gifts from the kitchen

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Home preserved foods make thoughtful gifts to share with friends or neighbors.

Use them to express appreciation, as a hostess gift, or to remember a shut-in. Food gifts are especially appreciated by working people who don't have time to do the extras and by older folks who don't have the energy to preserve foods. Many of these gifts can be made earlier in the year before the holiday rush. In addition, easy to make jams, jellies, syrups, ice cream toppings, and mixes can be made from readily available ingredients any time of the year.



However, keep in mind there are risks involved in giving home preserved foods. Improperly canned foods may contain spoilage organisms that can make you and your gift recipient sick.

The safest canned goods to give are high acid foods and those made with a high vinegar or sugar content. For example, give flavored vinegars, but avoid herbs or vegetables in an oil infusion. Pickles, relishes, and chutney should contain a lot of vinegar and should be safer to give than vegetable soup or canned meat. Fruits like peaches, cherries, plums, and cranberries or cranberry sauce are suitable choices because of their acidity. The high sugar content of fruit and most jams, jellies and preserves add an extra measure of safety and provide some barriers to spoilage. Because low sugar and no-sugar jams and jellies must rely on the acidity of the fruit and the preservatives added to special pectin products to prevent spoilage, always follow the directions that come with the pectin. Some require longer processing times than regular jams and jellies.

Because of the danger of botulism, especially in improperly canned low acid foods, we do not recommend giving gifts of home canned soup, vegetables, meats, or stews. There are no properly tested home canning recipes to recommend for canning pesto, thickened stews or soups, creamed soups, and pumpkin puree or pumpkin butter. Mixtures of acid and low-acid ingredients such as in vegetable salsas are a potential risk, if research based recipes have not been followed. If you are given a low acid canned food, receive it with a smile, thank the giver, and discretely dispose of it later unless you are sure the person canning the food uses research tested recipes and procedures. When you can for yourself you know if you have used safe canning

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methods; you don't know if what you have received is processed at the correct temperature long enough to destroy botulism spores. Likewise, be cautious when buying home canned goods at community bazaars.

Another way to give safe gifts is to give a frozen product such as a frozen pie, cake, or cookies. Freezer jams can be made quickly and retain a fresh fruit flavor.

Canned breads and cakes are not safe for gift giving. Refer to a previous blog: "Canning Cakes and Breads." Instead, give these gifts fresh or frozen. Another option is to make a "mix in a jar" by layering the dry ingredients for a quick bread into a jar and attaching the directions for baking it to the outside. It is a good idea to put a "use by" date on the label because ingredients such as baking powder will lose their effectiveness quickly and brown sugar will harden when combined with other ingredients. One month is an appropriate "use by" date. Other popular jar mixes include cookies, dry soup mixes and beverage mixes.

For canned gifts, use tested recipes from research-based sources such as USDA, the National Center for Home Food Preservation, or the Ball Blue Book® instead of canning traditional handed-down recipes. If you want to give a gift of your family's secret sauce, label it for refrigeration or freezing instead of canning it. Use only mason jars and new two-piece lids instead of decorative jars and bottles. Keep the latter for the dry mixes. Label all your food gifts with ingredients in case someone has a food allergy. Include any needed preparation or storage directions such as "refrigerate and use within two weeks." Ideas or tips for use of the gift are also appreciated.

Making food gifts in your kitchen says you care about the recipient when you take the time to make something special.

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