

(Not) Canning Dairy

NO CANNING OF BUTTER, CHEESE, CREAM, YOGURT, ETC.

Aside from a very tiny bit of butter that may be used to reduce foaming when canning jams and jellies, there are *no* home canning recommendations for dairy products, including butter, hard and soft cheeses, milk, and yogurt.

Many “recipes” for preserving butter or cheese circulating on the Internet involve filling canning jars with melted butter or cheese, applying lids, and then heating the jars in the oven. This method, known as “oven canning,” is not a true canning process, and it is not recommended for any type of food. The insufficient heat treatment (along with other safety issues) could allow bacteria to grow.

Other online “recipes” involve boiling water or pressure canning. These methods of canning dairy have not been scientifically tested, so the recipe purveyors are just guessing at processing times and resulting safety. Boiling water canning is not appropriate for dairy, as it is a low-acid food which can harbor *Clostridium botulinum* spores, whose toxin can result in serious (and potentially fatal) illness. Boiling water temperatures will not kill these spores. Even pressure canning may not be safe: The fat molecules contained in dairy products surround bacterial spores, protecting them from heat.

The Bottom Line: Butter, cheeses, milk and cream, and other dairy products are low-acid, high-moisture foods. Besides the safety issues involved with home canning, there are quality considerations as well, including rancidity, separation, and changes in functionality (such as butter behaving differently in some types of baking). There have been no scientific tests done to date to determine processing methods for canning safe, quality dairy products at home.

For further information on canning visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) at <https://nchfp.uga.edu> or contact your local Cooperative Extension office.

Brought to you by the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County
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