

Good news for modern canners

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By Wendell Brock - For the AJC

Does canning make you nervous?

All those vats of boiling water. The jams and jellies that won't set. The peeling, the chopping. The pickling, the perspiration.



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Zeb Stevenson, the executive chef at Watershed on Peachtree, shared this recipe for Summer Squash Chutney. The spicy condiment evokes the... [Read More](#)

Friends, there is no need to be that way! In just a few years, I've gone from fearful to gleeful to downright addicted to preserving food in jars.

Still, as comfortable as I am with putting up jams, jellies, pickles and preserves, it recently occurred to me that I often have no idea why I'm taking certain steps and precautions.

Over a recent lunch with [Martha McMillin](#), a whip-smart attorney who gave up her corporate job to open the beautiful canning boutique [Preserving Place](#) on Atlanta's Westside, I told her how little I knew about the science of canning. She kindly agreed to cook a recipe with me and answer my questions.



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Martha McMillin, the owner of Atlanta's Preserving Place on the Westside, fills jars with Rummy Peach Conserves. (Styling by Martha McMillin ... [Read More](#))

What would we make? That was easy: Rummy Peach Conserves.

When McMillin was in junior high school back in her home state of South Carolina, she worked as a peach grader for two summers. She resented her parents for making her do this “menial labor,” but she sure learned to love peaches. (So what's the difference in preserves and conserves? Conserves have nuts, and often dried fruit, mixed into what is essentially a chunky preserve.)

Before my canning tutorial, I stopped by Preserving Place one Saturday afternoon to witness Washington, D.C.-based [Cathy Barrow](#) — an extreme do-it-yourselfer and author of “Mrs. Wheelbarrow's Practical Pantry” (Norton, \$35) — demonstrate how to make bacon, butter and a couple of variations of strawberry jam.



RENEE BROCK

Cathy Barrow, author of “Mrs. Wheelbarrow's Practical Pantry” (Norton, \$35), created these Candied Chiles, and uses them in pimento cheese. The ... [Read More](#)

Ladling jam into jars, Barrow spilled the latest news in the world of canning science. Last year, the makers of Ball canning jars said it's no longer necessary to sanitize jars for preserves that will be

processed for 10 minutes or longer. And there is no need to pre-heat lids by immersing them in simmering water — ever.

That's revolutionary!

While you do need to wash jars and lids in hot soapy water, you no longer have to fish them out of boiling water, dump the water back into the pot and risk scalding your arm.

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But old habits die hard.

Some in the group shook their heads; others screwed their faces into question marks. “But ... but ... I don't understand,” one woman said.

Here's the thing. As McMillin explained the day we made her peach conserves, cold jars filled with hot food can crack. The way I see it, you are going to have a water bath ready for processing the jars. So why not give them a good rinse that will heat them at the same time?

Perfectly fine. But not necessary, Barrow says.

“I still warm jars if I am canning in the wintertime and my house is particularly cold, but I don't put them in boiling water anymore,” she says. “I give the jars a quick soap-and-water wash before placing them on a towel-lined tray in preparation for filling, and if I've brought those jars up from the basement or garage, I'll run them through the dishwasher, just to remove any spiders.”

As for the lids, [Ball's website](#) says: “Pre-heating lids is not required! After extensive testing by our Quality Assurance Team, we determined that it is no longer necessary to pre-warm lids before use. If you desire, it is still safe to simmer your lids before use; however, you should never boil them.”

OK. One last question.

Why do most canning manuals tell us to wait from 12 to 24 hours before handling the just-processed jars? “The seals haven't yet solidified,” Barrow explains, “and if a jar tips, the food inside could slip under the seal, making it less secure in the long run.”

Ready to give it a whirl? Keep in mind that food processed in a water bath for *less* than 10 minutes needs to be packed in jars that have been properly sanitized. “The only foods that are canned for 10 minutes or less are some pickles, some jellies and fruit juice,” Barrow wrote in *The Washington Post* last year, when she announced the big news. “Boil those jars or run them through a sanitizing dishwasher cycle.”

Now let's get canning.

We have recipes for Martha McMillin's Rummy Peach Conserves, Cathy Barrow's Candied Chiles, and Atlanta chef Zeb Stevenson's Summer Squash Chutney.

Rummy Peach Conserves

Martha McMillin's conserves are so good that she's thinking about making them to sell at Preserving Place, her canning kitchen and store at White Provisions. We made them with Georgia peaches and pecans and [Richland Rum](#), which is distilled in South Georgia. One trick I learned from McMillin: Peaches are much easier to peel if you dunk them in boiling water first. Just make an X across the stem side of the fruit, place in boiling water for about 2 minutes; then lift out with a slotted spoon. They peel like a dream. Just place a bowl underneath to catch all the juices.

8 pounds peaches

2 pounds (4 1/2 cups) granulated cane sugar

1/2 cup fresh lemon juice

4 large sprigs of chocolate mint (may use other types of mint) (optional)

1/3 cup finely chopped lightly toasted pecans

4-5 tablespoons of high-quality dark rum

Peel, pit and cut the peaches into pieces about the size of a nickel or a dime. If the peaches are quite firm, make them dime sized; if soft, make them nickel sized. In a conserve, you want the fruit to be distinguishable at the end, unlike a jam, where the fruit cooks into one solid mass.

Put the peaches into a wide, large, nonreactive heavy-bottomed pot. Stir in the sugar and lemon juice. Bring rapidly to a hard boil and maintain at a steady boil. As the peach conserves start to boil, bruise the chocolate mint stems with your hands to release their flavor; then add to the peach mixture. Stir periodically to keep the peach conserves from sticking to the bottom of the pan.

After about 10 minutes, use tongs to pick the mint stems out of the peach conserves. (This is why a long sturdy stalk is recommended, so it won't disintegrate.) Place a candy thermometer in the pot. It may take another 10-15 minutes or so for the peach conserves to thicken. Stir more frequently to be sure the conserve mixture does not stick or burn as it is thicker at this point. The peaches should be at a proper jammy state when the candy thermometer reaches 221 degrees, and the mixture is no longer foaming. When the peach mixture becomes thick and appears almost ready, stir in the pecans and rum.

Pack the conserves in warm jars, using a funnel and leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Run a bubble remover or knife around the inner edge of the jars to remove air bubbles. Wipe rims with a wet paper towel. Place lids and rings on the jars, and process in a hot water bath at a rolling boil for 10 minutes.

Remove the jars from the pot and place on folded towels (preferably on a tray, so that you can move them if you wish). Do not disturb until the jars are completely cool. Check to see if the lids have sealed by pressing down on the center. (If the lids don't bend, the jars are sealed.) Store any unsealed jars in refrigerator. Makes: 7 half pints

Per 1-tablespoon serving: 46 calories (percent of calories from fat, 5), trace protein, 11 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, trace fat (no saturated fat), no cholesterol, trace sodium.

Candied Chiles

Cathy Barrow, author of "Mrs. Wheelbarrow's Practical Pantry," created these red hot chile peppers. They are delicious on hot dogs, hamburgers and tacos; in pimento cheese, deviled eggs, and coleslaw; or as a cocktail garnish. The leftover syrup is excellent shaken with tequila and lime, mezcal and lemon, or bourbon and ginger ale. Like fried pickles? Add a few of these to your fry basket.

6 cups granulated sugar

4 (3-inch) cinnamon sticks

1 vanilla bean, slit open and seeds scraped out, seeds and beans reserved

8 allspice berries

Seeds from 12 green cardamom pods (or about 1/2 teaspoon cardamom seeds)

2 cups cider vinegar

3 pounds crisp jalapenos or serranos (green or red), sliced into 1/4-inch rings

In a 5-quart or larger nonreactive pan, combine the sugar, cinnamon, vanilla seeds and bean, allspice berries, cardamom and cider vinegar. Stir well and bring to a boil. Clip on a candy thermometer and boil hard until the syrup reaches 215 degrees Fahrenheit, about 10 minutes.

Add the sliced chiles, return the syrup to a boil and boil hard for 4 minutes. Remove the chiles with a slotted spoon and pack them tightly in warm jars.

Boil the syrup for 5 minutes more, then ladle over the chiles, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles using a bubbler or plastic knife, running it around the perimeter of the jars and through the chiles. Adjust the liquid, maintaining the headspace.

Wipe the jar rim clean with a damp paper towel. Place the lids and rings on the jars and finger-tighten the rings. Process in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes. Makes: 3-4 pints

— Adapted from "Mrs. Wheelbarrow's Practical Pantry" by Cathy Barrow (Norton, \$35)

Per 1-tablespoon serving: 74 calories (percent of calories from fat, 1), trace protein, 18 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, trace fat (no saturated fat), no cholesterol, trace sodium.

Summer Squash Chutney

Zeb Stevenson, executive chef at [Watershed on Peachtree](#), shares this spicy condiment recipe, which evokes the aromatic flavors of India. It would be good with cheese and crackers; in salads and sandwiches; or served with peas, beans, greens and grains.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 1/2 teaspoons whole mustard seeds

1 teaspoon cumin seed

1 teaspoon coriander seed

1/2 teaspoon fennel seed

2 teaspoons Spanish paprika

1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

2 shallots, minced

4 garlic cloves, minced

2 1/2 pounds summer squash (such as yellow squash or zucchini), cut into 1/2-inch dice

2 teaspoons potato starch

1/2 cup water

1/2 cup cider vinegar

1/3 cup light-brown sugar, packed

1 tablespoon salt

Heat the vegetable oil and mustard seeds in a large sauce pot over medium-high heat until the mustard seeds brown and begin to pop. Quickly add the cumin, coriander and fennel seeds. Toast for 15 seconds, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat to low. Add the Spanish paprika, turmeric and black pepper. Toast for 10 seconds, stirring constantly.

Add the shallots and garlic. Saute for 1 minute; then add the diced squash. Stir well; then allow the vegetables to cook for 5 minutes.

Combine the potato starch with the water and vinegar. After the vegetables have cooked, add the brown sugar, the vinegar mixture and the salt. Bring to a rolling boil and simmer 5 minutes.

Pour into sanitized jars. Cover with lids and store in the refrigerator immediately. Keeps for one month. Makes: 3 pints

Per 1-tablespoon serving: 11 calories (percent of calories from fat, 3), trace protein, 2 grams carbohydrates, trace fiber, trace fat (no saturated fat), no cholesterol, 90 milligrams sodium.