

For Immediate Release

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## **Emergency Preparedness and Food Preservation: Fall Canning and Freezing**

September is National Preparedness Month and Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) reminds residents to use safe, approved methods when preserving food. Proper food preservation is an excellent way to build emergency food supplies, since preserved food lasts longer and helps reduce waste. Safe methods protect against foodborne illnesses that can result from improperly preserved food.

“Food preservation is more than just a way to save your garden produce,” said Kay Schmidt, Emergency Response Coordinator at SWNPHD. “When done safely, canning and freezing are practical tools for emergency preparedness.”

Several preservation methods can be used to build a safe and reliable food supply, including canning, freezing, drying, curing, smoking, pickling, and fermenting. Of these, canning and freezing are the most common.

### **Canning**

Done correctly, canning destroys enzymes and removes oxygen, which prevents the growth of bacteria, mold, and yeast.

- Low-acid foods (most vegetables, meats, fish, seafood, milk, and some fruits) must be pressure-canned for safety.
- High-acid foods (pickles, salsa, jams, jellies, tomatoes, and some fruits) can be preserved with a water bath canner. Beginners are encouraged to start here before moving on to pressure canning.

### **Freezing**

Freezing is a quick and simple way to preserve the flavor and nutrients of fresh foods. It is especially useful for fruits, vegetables, and meats. To maintain food quality and safety:

- Use freezer-safe packaging (moisture- and vapor-resistant containers or bags).
- Remove excess air from bags or containers before sealing to reduce freezer burn.
- Blanch most vegetables before freezing to stop enzyme activity and preserve color, flavor, and texture.
- Keep the freezer at 0°F or lower for best quality.
- Label and date all items. Most frozen foods maintain quality for 8–12 months if stored properly.
- Avoid overloading the freezer; allow air to circulate for consistent freezing.

## Storage Tips

Proper storage is just as important as safe preservation. Keep these tips in mind:

- Clearly label and date each jar or package.
- Store canned goods in a clean, cool, dark, and dry place between 50–70°F.
- Do not stack jars more than two high to avoid damaging seals.
- If storing jars where they could freeze, insulate with newspaper or blankets.
- Rotate supplies—use or replace canned food and stored water before it expires. Home-canned food is best used within one year.
- Store water in food-grade containers that have been cleaned and sanitized and replace stored water every six months.

Important Reminder - Once a jar is opened, leftovers must be refrigerated and cannot be stored at room temperature.

For more information on safe food preservation, visit Nebraska Extension's Food Preservation website at [food.unl.edu/food-preservation](http://food.unl.edu/food-preservation) or call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website [swhealth.ne.gov](http://swhealth.ne.gov) contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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