

How To Can Milk

By Hoegger Farmyard Contributor Mary Jane Toth

While freezing milk will taste more like fresh, it takes up a lot of space in the freezer which costs energy to keep it frozen. Canning milk is one way to preserve your milk and save energy at the same time. It will keep for a long time on the shelf and will taste like any canned milk available from the grocery store. It will not be suitable for drinking, but will work great for making soups, sauces, gravies, puddings, fudge, etc. I like to have at least 100 quarts and a few pints put away so that when I dry off my does before kidding I have enough canned milk to get by until they freshen again.

In my book, 'Goats Produce Too!' I have included two methods of canning milk: hot water bath method and pressure canning. Hot water bath canning is not a recognized or USDA approved method for canning milk. It is a low acid food and the biggest fear is contamination with botulism. Botulism is found in all soils and can be killed with high heat temperatures. It is a bacteria that can grow in air tight containers and it is important that home canners take precautions to keep everything as clean as possible. I personally never had a problem with it because we never drank the canned milk and only used it for cooking. Therefore, everything we made with the canned milk was always cooked at boiling temperatures. My goats are very clean and we make sure that no debris or dirt is on the udders before we milk. However, because I don't want to promote a method that could prove risky for some people, I will not print a recipe that I would consider dangerous. I recommend that you use a pressure canner only so that you can get the milk to a high enough temperature to kill any harmful bacteria. When canning milk it is important to only use fresh milk. Do not try to can milk that you have stored in the refrigerator for a few days. Older milk will be more acidic and there is a risk that it could curdle at the high temperatures required to can in a pressure canner.

Equipment needed:

Pressure canner

Quart or Pint jars

Canning lids with rings

Jar lifter to help you get the hot jars out of the canner

Most canning recipes will say that you should use sterilized jars. There are various ways to sterilize the jars. The dishwasher is good, especially if you have a high heat setting on it. They can be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed well and filled with boiling water. Another method is to place the jars in a hot oven for several minutes. Having said all that, I usually just wash in hot soapy water or use my dishwasher. The high heat of the pressure canner is super hot inside and out. Before filling the clean jars with your milk, you will need to run your finger around the rim of each jar to check for nicks or cracks. Discard any jars that are not smooth and free of defects.

Place your canning lids in a pan and pour boiling water over them. Let them soak in the hot water while you are filling your jars. I don't worry about sterilizing the rings as they do not come in contact with any of the milk.

Keep in mind that this whole process will usually take a good hour for the pressure to build up to 10 lbs and another 30-60 minutes for the canner to cool enough to open it up.

Ready to begin:

Put water in the pressure canner to a depth of 2.5" and place on the stove/burner.

Fill clean jars with fresh milk, leave 0.5" head space, making sure you don't spill any milk on the rim of the jar. If you do, be sure to wipe it off.

Place a lid on the jar, screw on the ring and put into the canner.

Once canner is filled, put on the lid, tighten down and turn on the heat.

As the canner gets hot and begins to steam, let it exhaust steam for at least ten minutes before closing the exhaust nozzle.

Watch the pressure gauge, if your canner has a different set up then follow the manufacturer's instructions. It can take up to an hour for the pressure to reach 10lbs. Once the pressure has reached 10lbs, turn off the heat and allow the canner to cool a long time before trying to open the canner. On my canner, I open the exhaust valve and if no more steam escapes, then it is safe to open the canner.

Lay a towel on your cupboard, carefully remove hot jars from the canner and place on the towel. Jars should not be touching each other. Allow to cool for 24 hours before checking to make sure they are sealed and moving to storage.

Label them with the month and year the milk was canned. Milk will keep for 1-2 years or more if stored in a cool dark place.

Note: If you live in a high altitude area you need to bring the canner to 15 lbs. pressure.

It is normal for the milk to turn a slight tan color, as the milk sugar will darken the milk at high temperatures. The cream will rise to the top, just shake well before using.