COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
University of Alaska Fairbanks
FNH-00125

Canning Fish in Cans

Have clean and ready:

Pressure canner: Read manufacturer's instructions and have dial gauge pressure canners tested for accuracy each year at your nearest Extension district office.

Can sealer: Read instructions about assembling and adjusting the sealer. Set the can sealer for the use of the can size chosen. Closely inspect each can seam as it is removed from the can sealer. Adjust can sealer if seam is defective.

Cans and lids: 1 pound (size: 301 × 408) or ½ pound (size: 307 × 200.25), tapered, also called Alaska salmon cans.

Fish: 25 pounds of fish as caught will fill 12 1-pound cans or 24 ½-pound cans. Use only fresh fish. DO NOT use fish that is old or poor quality. Frozen fish may be canned, but make sure it is thoroughly thawed either in a refrigerator or under cold running water. Trim away all freezer burn. Proceed as with fresh fish.

Salt: Canning salt is best, but non-iodized salt may be used (salt is optional).

Measuring spoon

Sharp knife

Cutting board or cardboard or newspapers

Stove or any heat source that gives reliable, steady heat

Dry potholders

Towel or paper towels

Meat thermometer or one that can register 170°F

Permanent marker

Clock and/or timer

1. **Clean and wash fish thoroughly.**
   Scrape off scales and slime. Cut off head, fins and tail. Skin and bones may be left or removed. Take out guts and wash off blood. Rinse fish in a dishpan. Add 2 tablespoons vinegar per quart of water to help remove slime. Use the cleanest water you have.
2. **Cut the cleaned fish in can-sized lengths.**
   When cutting fish to fit cans, allow ¼ inch of empty space at top of can. This is called headspace.
3. **Salt is optional.**
   Add about 1 teaspoon of salt for a 1-pound can or ½ teaspoon of salt for a ½-pound can.
4. **Fill can, packing solidly.**
   Leave ¼-inch headspace at the top of the can.
5. **Critical point: Exhaust open cans to 170°F.**
   Cans must be exhausted so a vacuum will form after the can is sealed and cooked. This is done by heating the fish in open cans to 170°F. Water should come half way up the sides of the bottom row of cans. Turn heat on high and bring water to a boil. Place the open, filled cans in the pressure canner on a rack. DO NOT cover the canner with a lid unless each can is covered with aluminum foil. Adjust heat to keep water boiling. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of the fish in the cans. A second layer of cans may be exhausted in the pressure canner or in cake or roasting pans set on top of the stove (set open cans in water in the pan).
6. **When the temperature of the fish reaches 170°F, seal one can at a time.**
   Use a jar lifter or hot pad to handle can. With a clean cloth or paper towels, wipe the edge of each can carefully.
7. **Seal can using adjusted can sealer.**
   Set the hot, exhausted can on the sealer and place the lid on the can. Seal cans according to the instructions with your sealer. Check each can seam before placing the can in the pressure canner. (If a seam is incorrectly formed, adjust the can sealer immediately. The fish must be removed from the can and placed in a new can, heated to 170°F and resealed.) Check can seams often and adjust sealer as needed.
8. **Fill the canner by placing the sealed cans on the rack in the canner.**
   If you have a second layer, use a second rack or stagger the cans. Add more water to pressure canner if needed (to equal 3 quarts). Put canner lid on. When closed, lid handles must be centered over canner body handles. Turn heat on high. When steady steam starts coming out of the vent, let it escape for 10 minutes. This is called exhausting or venting.
9. **Close vent with weight or petcock.**
10. **Heat canner until the needle on the dial gauge reaches 11 pounds or until the 10-pound weighted gauge rocks or jiggles according to manufacturer instructions.**

Research for processing times was done by Kristy Long, former Extension Foods Specialist, Chuck Crapo, Seafood Quality Specialist for the Fisheries Industrial Technology Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Bret Luick, Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist, in 2005.

Adjust heat to keep pressure steady. Set timer and write down the time when proper pressure is reached. Figure the time the canning will be finished; write that time down too.

11. **Hold the pressure steady:**
Dial gauge canner, process at **11 pounds pressure** at altitudes of 0 to 2,000 feet

Can Size	Processing Time
1-pound cans (size: 301x408)	115 minutes
½-pound cans (size: 307x200.25)	95 minutes

Instructions for high altitude:

Altitude	Pressure
2,001-4,000 feet	12 pounds
4,001-6,000 feet	13 pounds
6,001-8,000 feet	14 pounds

Weighted gauge canner, process with 10-pound weight at altitudes of 0 to 1,000 feet

Can Size	Processing Time
1-pound cans (size: 301x408)	115 minutes
½-pound cans (size: 307x200.25)	95 minutes

(**At altitudes above 1,000 feet,** use 15-pound weight. Watch canner and check the pressure often. If pressure drops below recommended number of pounds, increase heat to bring pressure back up. When correct pressure is reached, start processing time from the beginning; 115 minutes for 1 pound cans or 95 minutes for ½ pound cans.

12. **At the end of the processing time, turn off the heat.**

13. **Move canner off the heat, if possible.**
Let the canner sit until pressure drops to zero. DO NOT release steam by tipping the weight or running the canner under cold water. It takes 25 to 35 minutes for pressure to drop in a small canner filled with cans and 45 to 60 minutes in a large canner with a full load.
On a dial gauge canner, wait for the overpressure plug to drop, the cover lock to drop and the gauge needle to rest on "0." Tip the pressure regulator — if no steam escapes, the pressure regulator and lid may be safely removed. On weighted gauge canners (ones with no dial gauge), wait for the overpressure plug to drop and the cover lock to drop. Test to see if pressure is down by gently nudging the weight. No steam should be released and no resistance should be felt. Remove the pressure regulator and the lid.

14. **Loosen the lid.**
Tilt the back edge up first to keep the escaping steam away from your face.

15. **Remove cans from canner with a jar lifter or hot pad.**
Put cans on thick cutting board, cooling racks or towels. Allow to cool completely for 12 hours. DO NOT put cans in cold water. Can ends will pull in when a vacuum is formed.

16. **When cool, check can seams.**
The seam should be flat and smooth with no pointed or rough edges. No leakage should be seen around the can edges.

17. **Wipe cans if they are greasy.**
Use a permanent marker to label cans with type of fish, date, processing time and pounds pressure. Store in a cool, dry place. Do not allow cans to freeze.

18. **Clean and dry your canner.**
Wrap in paper and store. DO NOT fasten lid on but wrap it in paper and place upside down on the canner to protect the gauge, vent and sealing ring.

19. **Check with your local Cooperative Extension Service office every year for updates on food preservation information and for pressure canner dial gauge testing.**

More research-based information can be found at:
www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211/907-474-5211

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