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Survey of home canning practices and safety issues in the U.S.

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The use of science-based, tested processes is critical to the safety of home-canned foods. A national survey was conducted to determine consumer knowledge and practice of home canning techniques. Results indicate a critical need for education and increased awareness of safety-related concerns. The objective was to identify food safety concerns in the practice of home canning, and to compare these results with those from a previous survey (year 2001). A 2005 national telephone survey of U.S. adults was conducted, using a 42-item questionnaire about consumers' home canning knowledge and habits. 801 complete interviews were obtained from randomly selected households across the nation, with a 95% confidence level and a 30% cooperation rate. Survey results indicate that about one in five households canned foods in 2004. The most popular sources of instructions continue to be family or friends (51.2%, earlier 48%) and cookbooks (16.7%, earlier 19%). 30.5% altered recommended canning procedures. Most commonly canned foods were vegetables (64.9%, earlier 71%) and tomato products (59.2%, earlier 60%). 9.2% used artificial sweeteners in canned foods, with sucralose being most popular. The dangerous practice of open-kettle canning (hot fills only) is still practiced for fruits and tomatoes (44% of canners), vegetables (35.4%) and meats or seafood (20%). 32% (earlier 38%) of all canners had jars that did not seal properly, and 35.6% (earlier 37%) stored their home-canned foods for longer than 12 months. Education and reinforcement of science-based food preservation resources are essential in promoting safe home-canning techniques. Failure to use recommendations can result in foodborne illness including botulism, or food spoilage. These survey results identify current critical areas of concern in U.S. consumer canning practices, and therefore provide guidelines for continued Extension-based efforts in this area.