

An updated look at home canning

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Home canning is a traditionally popular means of preserving seasonal produce or specialty foods. The last comprehensive survey of U.S. canning practices, published in 1979 by USDA, studied consumer practices used in 1975. Significant lapses in appropriate techniques were documented and later survey reports by others have not revealed major shifts toward improved practices. As research yields new information about how to safely preserve foods and recommended practices for consumers are subsequently changed, people do not necessarily adopt the revised recommendations. Therefore, trained interviewers at the Survey Research Center, University of Georgia, conducted two surveys to determine practices and information sources currently being used by home canners. Between October 2000 and January 2001, 135 telephone interviews from households randomly selected throughout the U.S. were completed. In October 2001, 179 Georgians answered questions in another random telephone survey. Compared to the 1970's, current findings indicate changes in the amount and types of foods canned at home, as well as methods used. They also document continued use of high-risk practices, including some that could lead to botulism. Friends or relatives are the primary source of instructions for today's home canners (43.5% in the national survey, 55.1% in the Georgia survey); this practice could promote continued use of outdated information. More people can low-acid vegetables than tomato products or fruits and many use unsafe methods in doing so. Findings document knowledge and canning methods that should be targeted in educational programs for this population. This project was supported by CSREES-USDA under Agreement No. 00-51110-9762.