

Home preservers learn safe canning practices in northern Idaho

AT A GLANCE

North Idaho participants learn the skills necessary to preserve food at home safely in order to protect themselves and others from foodborne illness.

The Situation

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, low-acid home-canned foods are the most common cause of botulism outbreaks in the United States. From 1996 to 2014, 30 percent of foodborne botulism outbreaks have been the result of consuming home-canned foods. These outbreaks occurred because home canners were uneducated about the proper procedures to follow when canning low-acid foods in the home.

Over the last few years, an increasing number of people are showing an interest in home food preservation. This increase is for a variety of reasons, including more control of what is in their food, saving money and becoming more self-sufficient.

Our Response

Amy Robertson, the University of Idaho Extension educator in Boundary County, has offered hands-on food preservation classes focusing on home canning in three counties in north Idaho, including Boundary County, Bonner County and in Nez Perce County on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation.

Robertson taught a total of 12 classes in 2016 and 2017. These classes have included canning meat, canning dried beans, canning jams and jellies, canning tomato products, canning wild game, and cooking and preserving from the orchard.



Amy Robertson, UI Extension educator, teaches class participants how to make and safely preserve tomato sauce.

Program Outcomes

At the beginning of each class, participants were asked why they chose to participate in a food preservation class offered by University of Idaho Extension. The reasons given were: to be in control of what's in my food (98 percent), to save money (78 percent), to be more self-sufficient (97 percent) and to better use the produce I grow (84 percent).

Food preservation evaluations were administered during these classes to measure and compare participants' knowledge both pre- and post-class. Prior to taking the class, only 46 percent knew it is necessary to always use up-to-date, tested, resource-based recipes and recommendations when canning food. Fifty percent of the participants did know that lemon juice or other acid needs to be added to tomato products when canning at home.

Post-class evaluations revealed that while taking these classes, participants increased their knowledge in the following areas:

- 69 percent learned that a pressure canner must be vented for 10 minutes before beginning to pressurize the canner.
- 64 percent learned what the proper procedure is for cooling down a pressure canner once the processing time is complete.
- 100 percent of class participants reported they would process all high-acid and low-acid foods according to research-based recommendations.

These self-reported behavior changes demonstrate that during these food preservation classes, participants learned the importance of following research-based recipes in order to protect themselves and others from foodborne illness.

The Future

Home food preservation continues to increase in popularity, creating the need for more educational opportunities through University of Idaho Extension. Robertson plans to meet these needs by continuing to teach food preservation classes throughout northern Idaho. Additional home canning classes have been scheduled in Latah County and Boundary County. In the near future, Robertson also plans to teach classes in Bonner County, Benewah County and Nez Perce County.



Robertson utilizes hands-on activities to teach participants the procedures for safe home food preservation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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