



FOOD PRESERVATION FAIR EXHIBIT AND JUDGING GUIDELINES

It is imperative that home canned foods be judged correctly to ensure proper food safety. The goals of a food preservation fair judge are to educate the fair exhibitors on the proper procedures for safely canning and exhibiting preserved foods and to also judge the quality of the exhibits. The goals of the fair personnel are to hire a properly trained judge to evaluate the food preservation entries and to keep the judge safe and healthy while doing their job of judging at the fair.

A judge must have special training to judge food preservation exhibits, as the mishandling and incorrect judging could cause a food-borne illness and even the potential of death. The only canned items that can be opened and tasted for judging include jellies, jams, and other soft spreads. No other canned products, including fruits, pickles, fermented products, vegetables, and meats, can be opened when being judged and definitely cannot be tasted. Dried and freeze-dried foods can be opened and can be tasted.

In addition to the food safety aspect, there is the food waste issue. If jars of home canned foods, other than jellies and soft spreads, are opened during judging, these jars of foods must be disposed of after being exhibited on a shelf and not refrigerated during the duration of the fair. This fair judging procedure has caused an economic hardship to the exhibitors due to food waste, which will negatively affect the number of food preservation exhibitors and exhibits at the fairs. There is a huge investment of time, labor, and money in preparing canned foods, and the needless wasting of those products is a shame.

Following are updated food preservation guidelines for both Open Class and 4-H exhibits. A list of recommended Open Class Food Preservation divisions and classes is also included.

Food preservation exhibit guidelines

The following guidelines must be followed to ensure proper food preservation methods were used by the exhibitor, which in turn will then ensure proper food safety for the exhibitor and the judge. All guidelines must be followed. If guidelines are not followed, that is grounds for disqualification of the exhibit.

1. Exhibits entered must have been prepared since the previous year's fair and have never been entered in fair before.
2. All canned fruits, vegetables, meats, pickled products, and jelly products must be prepared following the recipes and procedures, including the proper adjustments for altitude, from one of the approved sources listed below. When submitting canned foods for fair competition, do not use canning directions and recipes sourced from vintage canning recipes, recommendations from friends and family members, instructions from old canning books, mass media, the internet, and blog posts, unless they are from Extension or other approved sources.
 - Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving, 37th edition – 2020
 - Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving, 38th edition – 2024
 - Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving – 2020 edition
 - Ball Canning Back to Basics – 2017
 - The All-New Ball Book of Canning and Preserving – 2016

- So Easy to Preserve, 6th edition – 2020
 - Complete Guide to Home Canning, USDA – revised 2015
 - Preserving Food in Wyoming, University of Wyoming Extension – 2024
 - Commercial pectin recipes and manufacturer's instructions, and
 - Other up-to-date Extension publications
3. All canned foods must be exhibited in clear standard Mason jars, using the size of jar specified in the recipe.
 4. No colored jars can be used.
 5. Jelly and fruit spread products must be exhibited in regulation ½ pint or pint jelly jars that are sealed without paraffin.
 6. Two-piece metal canning lids (flat lid and band) must be used on all jars.
 7. Jars must be exhibited with the canning rings on.
 8. All jars, lids, and screw bands must be clean and free of any residue or rust.
 9. Any jars showing leaks and/or spoilage will not be judged and will be disqualified.
 10. All canned foods **MUST** be labeled by attaching a Food Preservation label to the side of the jar or to the entry tag. If Food Preservation label is not attached to a jar or entry tag, that jar will be disqualified from judging. The Food Preservation label must include the following information:
 - Name of product
 - Process method: Boiling Water, Steam Canning, or Pressure (circle one)
 - Processing time
 - Altitude processed at
 - Pounds pressure; Dial or Weighted gauge (circle one)
 - Style of Pack: Raw or Hot (circle style)
 - Date Processed
 - Source of recipe and page number of recipe
 - Attach copy of recipe to the label and entry tag
 - **IF FOOD PRESERVATION LABEL IS NOT ATTACHED TO THE JAR OR ENTRY TAG, THAT JAR WILL BE DISQUALIFIED FROM JUDGING.**

Suggested open class food preservation divisions and classes

Jellies, jams, preserves, marmalades, conserves, syrups, and butters (Divisions 1–3) may be opened and tasted during judging. Dried foods and freeze-dried foods may be opened and tasted (Divisions 10 and 11).

Due to potential hazards of food-borne illness, judges **WILL NOT** open any other canned food entries, including canned fruit, tomatoes and tomato products, canned vegetables, canned meat, pickles and relishes or condiments (Divisions 4–9).

There are basically two systems of judging that are commonly used in fair judging—the American System and the Danish System. Check with the superintendent or agent in charge before you begin judging to clarify which system you will be using and how many placings you will be required to make.

American System

Exhibits in this system are compared against a standard of perfection, as well as against the other entries in the competition. All exhibits in a particular class are looked at and ranked with only one selected for first place, second place, third place, etc. If there are no high-quality exhibits, at the judge's discretion, exhibits may be placed in the appropriate position, even if it is second or third place.

Danish System

In this system, all exhibitors receive a ribbon. All exhibits are grouped according to quality, and there may be multiple entries that get the same ranking and ribbon. Quality may vary from excellent to fair, and ribbon categories may be blue, red, white, and/or yellow. In this system of judging, exhibits are not in competition with or compared to each other. Champion and Reserve Champion ribbons will be awarded when exhibit merit is warranted.

Division 1: Jelly

Judging criteria: Flavor, color, clearness, consistency (firm, yet tender and quivery); proper jar head space

Class 1 Currant	Class 6 Grape	Class 11 Cherry
Class 2 Wild Currant	Class 7 Gooseberry	Class 12 Plum
Class 3 Chokecherry	Class 8 Strawberry	Class 13 Peach (yellow)
Class 4 Apple	Class 9 Blackberry	Class 14 Jalapeno
Class 5 Crab Apple	Class 10 Raspberry	Class 15 Any other, not listed
		Class 16 Best display of jellies, 3 different varieties

Division 2: Jam

Judging criteria: Flavor and color characteristic of fruit used. Consistency of size and shape of fruit pieces and distribution throughout mixture; proper jar headspace

Class 1 Blackberry	Class 5 Plum	Class 9 Apricot
Class 2 Cherry	Class 6 Strawberry	Class 10 Any other, not listed
Class 3 Chokecherry	Class 7 Raspberry	Class 11 Best display of jams, 3 different varieties
Class 4 Grape	Class 8 Peach (yellow)	

Division 3: Preserves, marmalades, conserves, syrups, and butters

Judging criteria: Flavor and color characteristic of fruit used. Consistency of size and shape of fruit pieces and distribution throughout mixture; proper jar headspace

Class 1 Peach (yellow) Preserves	Class 9 Currant Preserves	Class 17 Any other marmalade
Class 2 Plum Preserves	Class 10 Pear Preserves	Class 18 Conserve
Class 3 Strawberry Preserves	Class 11 Any other Preserve	Class 19 Chutney
Class 4 Apricot Preserves	Class 12 Orange Marmalade	Class 20 Apple Butter
Class 5 Raspberry Preserve	Class 13 Apricot Marmalade	Class 21 Grape Butter
Class 6 Watermelon Preserves	Class 14 Peach (yellow) Marmalade	Class 22 Plum Butter
Class 7 Tomato Preserves	Class 15 Plum Marmalade	Class 23 Any other fruit butter
Class 8 Cherry Preserves	Class 16 Pear Marmalade	Class 24 Any kind of fruit syrup
		Class 25 Best display of preserves, marmalades, syrups, conserves and butters, 3 different varieties

Division 4: Canned fruit

Judging criteria: Shape, color, and consistency of fruit; good proportion of fruit to syrup. Syrup is neither watery nor too heavy; clearness; proper jar headspace.

Class 1 Cherries	Class 7 Apples	Class 14 Wild Plums
Class 2 Peaches (yellow)	Class 8 Applesauce	Class 15 Rhubarb
Class 3 Pears	Class 9 Blackberries	Class 16 Fruit Nectar
Class 4 Strawberries	Class 10 Chokecherries	Class 17 Wine
Class 5 Apricots	Class 11 Gooseberries	Class 18 Fruit Salsa
Class 6 Plums	Class 12 Mincemeat	Class 19 Any other, not listed
	Class 13 Mincemeat (green tomato)	Class 20 Best display canned fruit, 3 different varieties

Division 5: Canned tomatoes and tomato products

Judging criteria: Uniform in size; prime stage of maturity; shape is well preserved; natural color; no indication of spoilage; bright, clear liquid; liquid covers food in the jar; full, but not crowded pack; proper jar headspace.

Class 1 Tomato Juice	Class 4 Tomato Sauce	Class 7 Chili Sauce
Class 2 Tomato/Veg. Juice Blend	Class 5 Spaghetti Sauce	Class 8 Any other, not listed
Class 3 Tomatoes	Class 6 Salsa	Class 9 Best display canned tomatoes and tomato products, 3 different varieties

Division 6: Canned vegetables

Judging criteria: Condition of vegetables; uniformity in size and shape; color; good proportion of vegetables to liquid; clearness of liquid; proper jar headspace.

Class 1 Beans	Class 6 Corn	Class 11 Vegetable Soup or Stew
Class 2 Peas	Class 7 Spinach	Class 12 Mixed Vegetables
Class 3 Beets	Class 8 Pumpkin	Class 13 Squash
Class 4 Carrots	Class 9 Swiss Chard	Class 14 Any other, not listed
Class 5 Asparagus	Class 10 Succotash	Class 15 Best display canned vegetables, 3 different varieties

Division 7: Canned meat

Judging criteria: Appearance of meat; size and uniformity of pieces; correct amount of liquid and fat; proper jar headspace.

Class 1 Beef	Class 5 Turkey	Class 10 Wild Fowl, any kind
Class 2 Mutton	Class 6 Wild Game	Class 11 Chili
Class 3 Lamb	Class 7 Pork	Class 12 Mincemeat
Class 3 Sausage	Class 8 Fish	Class 13 Any other, not listed
Class 4 Chicken	Class 9 Meat Soup Stock	Class 14 Best display canned meat, 3 different varieties

Division 8: Pickles and relish

Judging criteria: Produce uniform in size, color, and shape; plump and not shrunken; clear liquid; pickled fruits—tender, unbroken skins; pickled cucumbers - uniformly crisp and firm, no artificial coloring; attractive, economical pack of solids and liquid without crowding; liquid over the top of produce. Relish—mixture of evenly chopped vegetables, uniform in size, shape, and color; clear liquid; color—bright, fairly clear, and characteristic of kind of produce; proper jar headspace.

Class 1 Cucumbers, Sweet Pickles	Class 15 Beet Relish
Class 2 Lime Pickles	Class 16 Cabbage Relish
Class 3 Cucumbers, Dill Pickles	Class 17 Corn Relish
Class 4 Watermelon Pickles	Class 18 Cucumber Relish
Class 5 Beet Pickles	Class 19 Green Tomato Relish
Class 6 Tomato Pickles	Class 20 Dilled Beans
Class 7 Sweet Pickle, Peaches (yellow)	Class 21 Piccalilli
Class 8 Mustard Pickles	Class 22 Sauerkraut
Class 9 Bread and Butter Pickles	Class 23 Pepper Relish
Class 10 Crab Apple Pickles	Class 24 Horseradish
Class 11 Any Other Vegetable Pickles	Class 25 Pickled Peppers
Class 12 Any Other Fruit Pickles	Class 26 Pickled Asparagus
Class 13 Pickle Relish	Class 27 Any Other Kind of Relish
Class 14 Mixed Relish	Class 28 Best display pickles and relishes, 3 different varieties

Division 9: Condiments

Judging criteria: Proper consistency for the product; pleasing and appropriate color for specific product; appropriate texture for the product; vinegars should be clear; proper jar headspace

Class 1 Ketchup	Class 4 Mustard
Class 2 Barbeque Sauce	Class 5 Vinegar
Class 3 Chili Sauce	Class 6 Any Other Condiment
	Class 7 Best display condiments, 3 different varieties

Division 10: Dried foods

Judging criteria: Entries will be evaluated on pliability, color, flavor, shape, texture, uniformity, overall dryness, and overall appearance.

1. All foods must be the product of the previous year through present date.
2. All dried foods must include the following information on the label:
 - Name of product
 - Date dehydrated
 - Pre-treatment used
 - Process used - food dehydrator, oven drying, sun drying, air drying, microwave drying (circle one)
 - Time that food product was dehydrated
 - Source of recipe or instructions
 - Attach a copy of your recipe or instructions to the entry tag
 - IF FOOD PRESERVATION LABEL IS NOT ATTACHED TO THE ENTRY OR ENTRY TAG, THAT ENTRY WILL BE DISQUALIFIED FROM JUDGING.

3. Jerky **MUST** be prepared according to recipes from the approved sources. Include your recipe with your entry. Check with your local University of Wyoming Extension Office to obtain approved recipes.

Class 1 Strawberries (¼ cup)	Class 11 Mushrooms (¼ cup)
Class 2 Apples (¼ cup)	Class 12 Dried Vegetable Mix (¼ cup)
Class 3 Grapes (¼ cup)	Class 13 Any Other Vegetable (¼ cup)
Class 4 Bananas (¼ cup)	Class 14 Soup Mix (½ cup)
Class 5 Raspberries (¼ cup)	Class 15 Herbs (¼ cup)
Class 6 Tomatoes (¼ cup)	Class 16 Meat (6 pieces)
Class 7 Dried Fruit Mix (¼ cup)	Class 17 Trail Mix (½ cup)
Class 8 Fruit Leather (6 pieces)	Class 18 Granola (¼ cup)
Class 9 Any Other Fruit (¼ cup)	Class 19 Any other dried food
Class 10 Onions (¼ cup)	Class 20 Best display of dried foods, 3 different varieties

Division 11: Freeze-dried foods

Judging criteria: Entries will be evaluated on color, flavor, shape, texture, uniformity, and overall appearance.

1. All foods must be the product of the previous year through present date.
2. All dried foods must include the following information on the label:
 - Name of product
 - Date freeze dried
 - Time that food product was freeze dried
 - Source of recipe or instructions
 - Attach a copy of your recipe or instructions to the entry tag
 - **IF FOOD PRESERVATION LABEL IS NOT ATTACHED TO THE ENTRY OR ENTRY TAG, THAT ENTRY WILL BE DISQUALIFIED FROM JUDGING.**
3. Jerky **MUST** be prepared according to recipes from approved sources. Include your recipe with your entry. If it is not included, the exhibit will be disqualified. Check with your local University of Wyoming Extension Office to obtain approved recipes.

Class 1 Fruit	Class 7 Eggs
Class 2 Vegetable	Class 8 Combination Food
Class 3 Red Meat	Class 9 Meals
Class 4 Poultry	Class 10 Candy
Class 5 Fish	Class 11 Snacks
Class 6 Dairy (cheese, yogurt, ice cream)	Class 12 Any Other

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