



# UW

# Vinegar and Canning

Extension

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## Check Vinegar Acidity For Safe Canning

Did you know vinegars come in various acidity levels? Vinegar with different levels of acidity is sold in stores. When home canning and pickling, always use vinegar with 5% acidity. Look at the label to be sure that the vinegar you use is at least 5% acidic!

The National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) provides the following guidance regarding the vinegar percentage for home canning:

- Many home canned food recipes use 5% acidity vinegar as an acid ingredient. The vinegar increases acidity, thus lowering pH, helping these foods reach a safe pH for boiling water canning.
- Recipes from the USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning and the National Center for Home Food Preservation are tested using 5% vinegar. Low-acidity vinegars have become increasingly prevalent, so consumers can't grab any bottle from the shelf. Vinegar with less than 5 percent acidity cannot be used in home food preservation.
- If your research-tested recipe does not specify a particular type of vinegar, you may safely use either distilled white or apple cider vinegar as long as it is labeled as 5% acidity. Sometimes, it is labeled as 50 grain.
- Specialty vinegars include red or white wine, malt, balsamic, and other flavors. Use specialty vinegar only when specified in a research-tested recipe. Some vinegars have 6–7% acidity. Stay in the 5–7% acidity range for home food preservation.
- Do not use homemade vinegar when pickling. The acidity of homemade vinegar is not consistent.

- Vinegar with less than 5% acidity is not recommended because it may not provide enough acid to produce a safe, shelf-stable product. The product can result in spoilage as it is inadequate to control microbial growth. There must be a minimum, uniform level of acid throughout the mixed product to prevent the growth of botulinum bacteria.
- Only reduce the acidity when using a research-tested recipe instructing you to add water to the product. In addition, be aware the water in the food also dilutes the brine concentration. Some recipes direct you to soak cucumbers or other food products in salt water for a period of time before canning them in the pickling brine. This procedure reduces the amount of water going into the brine.
- University of Wyoming Extension urges home canners to buy vinegar with 5% acidity for continued safe canning. Home canners must remember to check the vinegar label for its acidity level.
  - If your canned products have been preserved for less than 24 hours using 4% vinegar or less, store the jars in the refrigerator to maintain the safety and quality of the product, as these foods are not considered safe to store at room temperature.
  - If your home canned products have been preserved for more than 24 hours using 4% acidity or less, discard those canned foods.

For information on home preserving, including canning, freezing, and drying, visit <https://uwyoextension.org/uwnutrition/category/food-preservation> or contact your local extension office.

(SOURCE: National Center for Home Food Preservation, University Georgia Extension; USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning; University of Wyoming Extension.)



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