

How To Can Chicken

{Important Note: You MUST have a pressure canner (different from a pressure cooker) in order to can meat. It's a bit of an investment, but well worth it!}

First off... there are two ways to can chicken: raw pack or hot pack. Raw pack is just as it sounds-- you put the chicken in the jars raw, and then process them in the pressure canner, and the chicken cooks as it processes. Hot pack is when you cook the chicken first and then process it. I've done both ways and like both for different reasons. Raw pack is so much faster to do, obviously because you skip the whole step of cooking the chicken first. The raw pack method, however, produces more of a shredded chicken. So I use it in recipes like chicken enchiladas, [chicken enchilada soup](#), [chicken salad sandwiches](#), [coconut curry chicken](#)... you get the idea. The hot pack method is a little more labor intensive on the front end, but produces chicken that holds it's shape a little better. So I like to use this for meals where I prefer the chicken to be in more of a chunk rather than shredded... such as [thai peanut chicken noodle salad](#), [broccoli curry chicken casserole](#), [green bean chicken alfredo](#), and basically any of my casserole dishes. I always make sure I have some of each kind. Okay. Shall we proceed?

Step 1. When canning chicken, I like to start with a clean work area. One, because it helps me think/function/work better to be in a clean and organized environment, and two, because I have major raw chicken germ phobias and I don't want those icky germs infesting anything more than they have to- lol. (Note the big canister of Clorox wipes in the background of the pictures!) :)

Step 2. Get out all your equipment and check to make sure it is in good, clean order: pressure canner, jars, lids, rings, and your canning tools. Check your jars to make sure there aren't any cracks or nicks. (You can use either pint jars or quart jars, depending on how much chicken you usually use in a meal. Pint jars will take approximately 1 lb of chicken to fill, and quart jars will take closer to 2 lbs. I mainly do pints.) *{Tip: You will want to use the wide mouth jars... especially if doing raw pack. Raw pack tends to leave some science-projecty-type looking stuff in the jars, and unless you have an itty bitty hand, it is SO SO difficult to clean it out of a regular mouth jar.}* For the lids, I always use new ones when I'm doing canning. They're not expensive and I don't like risking that the jars won't seal because I'm re-using old lids. And finally, check your canner as well. I have a Presto pressure canner (which I know isn't the fanciest option out there, but it gets the job done and I love it) so I give it a once over and make sure all is well with the rubber gasket, the spout is clear, etc. (Oh, and while I'm checking it, I usually go ahead and fill it with the 3 quarts of water it will need, along with 2 Tablespoons of vinegar.)

Step 3. Make sure your jars, lids and rings are squeaky clean. Fill the sink with hot, soapy water and let them relax in a sudsy bath while you slave away over the chicken. :)



Step 4. Rinse and dry the jars, lids, and rings in preparation for filling. (Not shown: You should also get a small pot of water boiling on the stove and put the lids in. This sanitizes the lids as well as softens the rubber rings on them so they will get a better seal.)

Step 5. Prepare your chicken. Wondering how much you need? Well, remember a pint jar will take about 1 lb of chicken and quart jars will take close to 2 lbs. My canner will process 7 pint jars at a time, so I need roughly 7 lbs of meat for each batch (although you don't have to do a full batch if you don't want to).

If you are doing raw pack, simply cut your raw chicken into large chunks (size doesn't really matter since, as I said, it's all going to basically turn into shredded pieces anyway). *{Tip: It's a whole lot easier to cut your chicken if it is partially frozen.}*

If you are doing hot pack, you will want to go ahead and cook your chicken and then cut it into your desired size of chunks. For cooking your chicken, you can boil it, grill it, or Hubby likes to smoke it on the pit. (You can get some pretty darn good flavors in your canned chicken by marinating it first and then smoking/grilling it prior to canning! :) ...although I should say, it doesn't say anywhere in the canning book that you should marinate and grill your chicken. It only mentions boiling it. But we have never had a problem.) When cooking it, you don't have to make sure it's cooked all the way through-- just till most of the pink is gone. Remember, it's going to cook more as it processes in the canner.

Step 6. While you're preparing the chicken, get the water heating up in your pressure canner. For my Presto canner, it says to add 3 quarts of water (there's an indicator line marked on the inside) along with 2 Tablespoons of vinegar (the vinegar helps prevent hard water spots on your jars and keeps them nice and clean) and bring it up to a boil.



Step 7. Once all your meat is cut up, go ahead and fill your jars. *{Tip: I start by filling each jar just about halfway and then fill them the rest of the way with the remaining chicken. This helps to make sure they're getting equal amounts.}* Be sure to leave at least a 1-inch space from the top of the rim (called 'headspace').

Step 8. Add your canning salt, if desired. *{Tip: Remember to only use salt specifically for canning or pickling. Regular salt will cloud up your jars.}* Add ½ teaspoon for pint jars or 1 teaspoon for quart jars.

Step 9. If you are doing the hot pack method, fill each jar with either hot water or hot broth, leaving 1-inch headspace at the top. If you are doing the raw pack method, you will skip this step because the chicken will make its own broth as it processes. However, I have found that the resulting broth does not fully cover the chicken... which isn't a problem... but I like for all the chicken to be covered. So I generally will add a little water or broth (just about ¼ of the way up the jar) when I'm

doing raw pack.

Step 10. (No picture) With a damp cloth or paper towel, carefully wipe the rim of each jar to ensure it is completely clean. If any grains of salt or little pieces of chicken or something are on the rim, they will interfere with getting a good seal, or your jar may not even seal at all.



Step 11. Using your magnetic jar lid grabber thingy, remove a lid from your boiling water on the stove and place it on top of a jar (try not to touch the under side of the lid since it is now sterilized). Then screw on a ring until it is 'finger tight'. (That just means you make sure it is secure, but you don't screw it on with all your might or anything.) :) Repeat for each jar.

Step 12. Place your prepared jars into your pressure canner (try to keep the jars from touching).

Step 13. {Important Note: These last few steps are for the Presto canner that I have. Although the process will be similar for all canner types, you will want to reference the instructions for your specific canner, as they will likely be different!} Place the lid on your canner and secure it until it is fully closed. (The picture shows the lid on, but not fully closed yet. You have to twist it till the handles are lined up for it to be fully closed.)

Step 14. Keep the pressure canner over high heat and watch for a steady stream of steam to come out of the spout thingy on top. (It will probably be about 7-10 minutes before you start seeing steam.) Once it starts steaming steadily, set the timer for 10 minutes.

Step 15. After the 10 minutes are up, place the pressure regulator with 10 lbs of pressure on the spout (10 pounds of pressure is the regulator plus just one of the metal rings that fit on it) and wait for the regulator to start rocking at a rapid pace (this will probably take another 10-15 minutes).



Step 16. Once the regulator is rocking, set the timer again: 75 minutes for pints; 90 minutes for quarts. Then reduce the heat a bit to just keep the regulator at a gentle rocking. (My heat usually ends up being between medium and medium-high.)

Step 17. At the end of the processing time, simply turn the heat off and then just leave the canner alone so it can cool on its own. You do NOT want to force the lid open or quickly release the pressure or anything. Doing so could explode your jars. Just so ya know! :) So just leave it alone until the overpressure plug has dropped of its own accord. (Mine usually takes anywhere from 30-45-60 minutes... somewhere in there.) Then go ahead and remove the pressure regulator (no steam should release at this point) and open the lid.

Step 18. Remove the jars from the canner and place on a towel to continue cooling, leaving a bit of space between each jar. (Note: The jars of chicken in the picture are of chicken processed using the hot pack method. I believe they were thighs and drumsticks, etc that had been smoked. Chicken breasts make for better chunks, since you can just cut them into the size you want. These had to be pulled off the bone, so we were left with whatever size it came off the bone as. Also, if you do raw pack, just be aware that the end result will end up looking a little more like a jar that belongs in the science lab. But don't let this deter you!! It's still awesome and tastes totally normal! :))

Step 19. As the jars sit and cool, you will likely hear some popping. This is the lids sealing. Each lid should "pop" to indicate it is sealed. It can take up to several hours for all the jars to pop and seal, so just keep an eye on them and don't panic if your lid isn't sealed right away. If, however, after 6 hours or so (or the next morning- if you were doing this late at night like I usually am!) you have a lid that has still not sealed (meaning you can push on the lid and the bubble on it still pops up and down), you will want to go ahead and put that jar in the fridge to use within the next few days. Technically, you could actually try to process the jar again, but I'd only ever consider that if I happened to be doing another batch anyway. But you could do it if you wanted to. :)

Step 20. Once the jars are fully cooled, remove the rings and give the jars and rings a quick little bath. :) Just rinse around the outer rims and the inside of the rings with a little soapy water to remove any grimy, greasy stuff that may have leaked out during the processing. {Heads up: If you neglect to do this, you may end up with a few critter friends who are attracted to the stuff stuck on your jars.} After their bath you can place the rings back on the jars, but it's not necessary. You can leave them off if you'd like.

Step 21. I also like to check each jar at this point to make sure that the sealed lid is fully secure. I've had a couple of jars where, even though the lid had popped shut and sealed, I was still able to pull the lid off with my hands simply by applying just a little bit of pressure. Realistically, the jars probably would have been fine if I had left them alone since the lid was still sealed, but my opinion is that if it's *that* easy to pull open with my fingers, then there's probably a chance that it will un-seal on it's own while it's just sitting on the shelf... at which point I would never know until I went to use it and then I'd have bad meat. So I just like to give it a test and make sure they're solidly sealed. And if it opens, just throw it in the fridge to use within the next few days--same as if it hadn't sealed in the first place.

Step 22. CONGRATULATIONS! You're done! Just slap a label on those bad boys, throw them on the shelf, and call it a day! ☺ Enjoy!!

{**Tips For Using Your Canned Chicken:** The first thing I do is to drain and rinse my canned chicken. This gets rid of a lot of the 'canned' smell. Next I like to sauté it in a frying pan with just a drizzle of olive oil and a bit of McCormick's Grilled Chicken Seasoning (Montreal Style). This particular seasoning is amazing at bringing in a freshly grilled chicken smell, but I imagine most seasonings would enhance the chicken wonderfully. So at this point, it's ready to add to my meal. Delicious! You'd never know it came from a can!}