

JUDGING PRESERVED FOODS

(Updated February 2014)

Basic Concepts

The characteristics and responsibilities of a good judge are the same regardless of the types of exhibits being judged. If you have not already completed the manual sections entitled **Introduction** and **Basics of Judging**, it would be a good idea to work through these before proceeding with this section.

As you will note in the introductory material, fairs differ in their rules. It is very important that you review the fair catalog before you go to judge to make certain you consider the rules of that fair in making your determinations. For specific details regarding processing times, pressure where appropriate, recipe, and jar size, refer to USDA's 2009 *Complete Guide to Home Canning, So Easy to Preserve* 4th or 5th edition, or Extension publications updated or written after 1995.

To be able to judge preserved foods requires study, careful training, and good judgment. You must be knowledgeable about food preservation and about what the various types of products should look like if they are of prizewinning quality.

In Arkansas, canned foods are not opened during judging. This means that a judge must rely on visual inspection to judge characteristics like flavor and texture. Flavor of vegetables is usually indicated by maturity of the product and general appearance; flavor of fruits is usually indicated by ripeness and appearance. Integrity, or wholeness of the product, is a good indication of texture.

Completing a scorecard for each entry would be the ideal method of judging; however, when there are a large number of entries, completing a scorecard for each is often too time-consuming. It is, therefore, important that judges become very familiar with the criteria on the suggested scorecards in the following text so they can mentally score each entry.

In general, four sets of characteristics are considered when judging a preserved food. These are:

- Safety
- Container
- Pack
- Appearance

Safety

The first aspect of judging a home-preserved food is whether it is safe or not. In order to determine safety, exhibits must be labeled with the name of the food, the date preserved, and the method of food preservation. **Entries without required labeling will not be judged and are therefore disqualified unless otherwise noted in the fair book.**

If the food is canned, the label must state how the food was processed, boiling water or pressure canned, the process time, and the pounds of pressure if pressure canned. The appropriate times and processing methods should be verified by referring to USDA's 2009 *Complete Guide to Home Canning, So Easy to Preserve* 4th or 5th edition, and/or Extension Service publications updated or published after 1995. The size and type of jar must also be considered. The lids and bands of jars must also be considered.

If the entries do not meet the recommended specifications for processing method, time, and pressure plus size and type of jar, they will not be judged and are therefore disqualified.

Key safety points:

- Low acid foods must be pressure canned. These foods include meats, poultry, seafood, vegetables, and some combination foods such as soup mixes, spaghetti sauce with meat, and salsas.
- Acidic and appropriately acidified foods (expected pH less than 4.6) such as pickles may be processed in a boiling water canner for a shelf-stable product. However, many fruits also have published pressure canning alternative processes.
- Jams, jellies, and fruit preserves should be processed in a boiling water canner.
- Paraffin should not be used to seal jams, jellies, or any food.
- Open kettle canning (putting hot food in a jar, putting the lid on it, and giving it no further processing) is not acceptable for any shelf-stable canned product.
- Soup mixes or other foods with thickeners (like flour or starch), cream or milk, pasta/noodles, or rice are not permitted unless an established process from recognized sources can be documented.
- Appropriate altitude adjustments must be made for processing times and pressures.
- Clear Mason-type jars, with "Mason" specified on the jar or on the box, must be used.
- Jars must be of appropriate size. Smaller jars are acceptable if there are published instructions for larger jars. Larger jars are unacceptable if there are no published instructions.
- Metal lids and rings must be used for fair entries at this time.

Containers

The second step in judging preserved foods is to look at the container.

Product should be in a Mason-type, standard size (1/2 pint, pint, or quart), clear canning jar. Regular or wide-mouth styles may be used, but containers must have a threaded top with a self-sealing, two-piece metal lid.

Commercial jars, like the ones used for mayonnaise, peanut butter, coffee, pickles, and jelly, are not recommended for home canning. Since they are much more likely to break during processing and are less likely to seal properly, they are **not allowed** for competition in fairs. The fair officials responsible for checking in entries will usually spot these jars and eliminate them from judging. If, however, jars of this type are entered, they should not be judged.

Also, if jars were purchased in the canning section of a store but do not specify that they are Mason-type jars either on the jar itself or on the box, they are **not** allowed for competition. They may be safe for home canning, but no current USDA recommendations exist for their use. Therefore, they should be excluded from competition. Colored jars should also be excluded. Two-piece lids consist of a flat metal lid held in place by a metal band. Lids must be brand new. Bands should be clean and free of rust. They should not be bent or misshapen. The old style bail-type closures and porcelain-lined zinc caps are not acceptable. Plastic lids may be safe for home canning but are **not allowed** for competition, as it is impossible to detect a correct seal.

Jars should be clean and free of mineral deposits. A judge should recognize that handling in transit to the fair and by fair workers may have resulted in smudges on jars. It is generally fairly easy to distinguish between jars that were clean but handled and ones that were not clean to start with.

While judging the container, the judge should test to see that the jar has a seal. This is usually done by pressing the middle of the lid with a finger. If the lid springs up when the finger is removed, the lid is not sealed. An alternative test would be to hold the jar at eye level and look across the lid. A sealed lid should appear curved down in the center, not flat or bulging.

Next the judge should loosen the band. This allows a check under it for cleanliness. It also makes it easier to see that there is a proper amount of **headspace**.

Pack

The way the food is packed in the jar is important. A consideration in judging the pack is its safety. Food should be packed into the jar in such a way that heat can easily penetrate throughout the jar's contents. This means there must be a proper balance of solids and liquids. Tightly packed solids make it difficult for heat to penetrate throughout the mass. There should be enough liquid present so that liquid covers the product and prevents the jar contents from being solid, yet there should not be excess liquid.

Next to consider is headspace. Headspace is the unfilled space above the food in a jar and below its lid. Recommendations for headspace are:

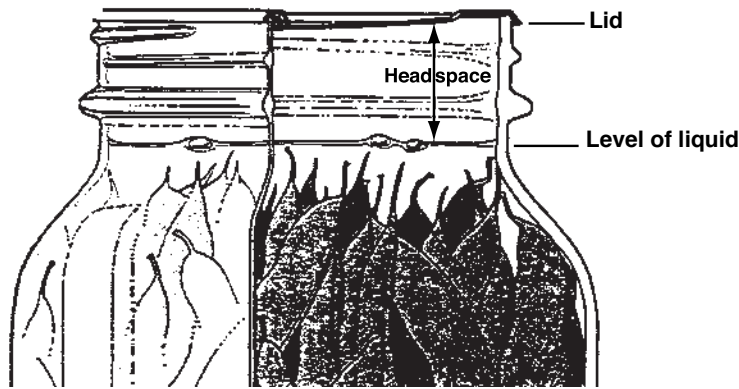
1/4 inch for jams, jellies, juices, and fruit purées

1/2 inch for fruits, pickles, and tomatoes processed in a waterbath canner

1 to 1 1/4 inches for vegetables, meats, or other products processed in a pressure canner

In addition to being safe, a pack should be neat and attractive, and it should make good use of jar space. It is not practical to prepare a jar of product that has very little in it. On the other hand, a jar packed too tightly will probably yield lower-quality product and may even be unsafe, since it is difficult for heat to penetrate throughout a tightly packed jar.

Controlling Headspace



The unfilled space above the food in a jar and below its lid is termed *headspace*. Directions for canning specify leaving 1/4 inch for jams, jellies, and purées; 1/2 inch for fruits and tomatoes to be processed in boiling water; and from 1 to 1 1/4 inches in low-acid foods to be processed in a pressure canner. This space is needed for expansion of food as jars are processed and for forming vacuums in cooled jars. The extent of expansion is

determined by the air content in the food and by the processing temperature. Air expands greatly when heated to high temperatures. The higher the temperature, the greater the expansion. Foods expand less than air when heated.

Fancy packs are not allowed. Packs of this type are too time-consuming to prepare to be practical and may not allow adequate heat penetration for safety. The one exception to this is the shingle pack used for fruit halves.

Appearance

Quality of the fresh product and the care with which it is handled are the major determinants of the appearance of the canned product. The fresh product should have been young and tender. It should have been free from defects such as blemishes, decayed spots, or sunburned spots.

The color of the canned product should be that of a good cooked product. It should be uniform and should show no signs of over- or under-processing.

Product pieces should be of uniform size and shape. This not only adds to the appearance of the product but also assures more uniform cooking. The pieces should be of a size and shape appropriate for the product.

Product and texture should be tender but not mushy. The product should hold its shape with no sign of overcooking.

Liquids in the jar should be fairly clear and free of cloudiness or sediment. Starchy vegetables may have a slightly cloudy liquid but should not have a starchy sediment. Liquid in tomatoes and berries should have a natural color characteristic of the product.

There should be no trash, foreign particles, or sediment in the jar. Air bubbles should not be present, and there should be no gas bubbles or other signs of spoilage.

Canned Vegetables

Canned vegetables should meet all of the general characteristics for safety, containers, pack, and appearance described above.

The basic scorecard below is used for judging canned vegetables. Specific characteristics of individual products that must be considered when scoring are discussed following the scorecard.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Maturity of product Young and tender, prime stage of maturity, free of strings, fibers, large stems, cores, white streaks, or starchiness	30
Pack Jars filled to appropriate headspace*; all space filled but not crowded; liquid covers product, is clear, and is free of unnatural cloudiness; good proportion of liquid to solids; no sediment in bottom of jars and no foreign material such as stems, leaves, shucks, etc.	20
Uniformity Pieces uniform in size and shape; even color throughout; color characteristic of product; free of blemishes, bruises, and insect damage	20
Texture Vegetables should hold their shape and not appear overcooked; no split beans or peas	20
Container Mason-type canning jar**; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed	10
Total Points	100

* For vegetables, product and liquid should be filled to within 1 inch of the top of the jar. Starchy vegetables, like corn, shelled beans, and peas, need 1 1/4 inches since they expand more during heating.

** If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Judging Criteria for Individual Vegetables

ASPARAGUS	Look for uniform length and size of stalks, not less than 1/2-inch thick. Color should be bright, and scales at tips should be closed.
BEANS (GREEN AND WAXED)	Want fresh color, typical of variety. Pieces should be uniform in size, length, and color. Beans should not be prominent in pods. Variety may be flat- or round-podded, but both should not be included in one jar.
BEETS	Beets less than 2 inches in diameter may be canned whole. Larger beets should be sliced or cubed. All beets in jar should be uniform size and shape. Look for color that is dark and deep, typical of the variety. Brownish-red or faded color or white rings are undesirable. Liquid should be sparkling color with no cloudiness or sediment.
CABBAGE	Want a pack consisting of pieces that are cut good-sized without prominent midribs. Pack should be tight but not solid. Color should be natural and even.
CARROTS	May be canned whole if small. Diameter depends somewhat on variety but should be uniform within pack. If sliced, slices should be uniform, smooth, and fairly thin. Color may be very pale to deep orange, depending on variety, but should be uniform.
CORN – WHOLE KERNEL	Pieces should be cut to about three-fourths depth of kernel. Color should be bright and consistent with variety. Jars should contain a single variety. Want a good proportion of corn and liquid. The liquid may be slightly cloudy from starch, but there should be no excess starch or sediment.
CORN – CREAM STYLE	Should be canned in pints only. Should be cut from cob at about center of kernel and cob scraped. Consistency should be thick but not stiff. The liquid is cloudy from starch.
GREENS (SPINACH, MUSTARD, TURNIP, etc.)	Look for young, succulent leaves, free of tough stems and large midribs. They should be packed loosely in jar. Want uniform green color. Liquid should be light green and clear.
LIMA BEANS	Beans should be full and tender. Immature beans, beans changing from green to light green or white, and starchy tough beans are undesirable.
OKRA	Want young, tender pods. Small pods may be left whole; larger ones should be sliced. Color is dependent on variety. Liquid should be fairly clear and free of starchy sediment.

PEAS (GREEN OR ENGLISH)	Peas should be uniform size and appear young and tender. There should be no broken or mushy peas. Color should be bright and light green with no yellow or white peas. Liquid should be fairly clear; however, a slightly starchy appearance is allowable. There should be no excess starch or starchy sediment.
PEAS (FIELD)	Characteristics are the same as for green peas, except color should be consistent with variety. Only one variety should be in jar.
POTATOES (WHITE)	Small potatoes (1 to 2 inches in diameter) may be packed whole. Larger sizes should be cubed. Product in pack should be uniform size, firm, plump, and smooth. Eyes should be shallow. Color should be white and uniform. Liquid should be fairly clear; however, a slightly starchy appearance is allowable. There should be no excess starch or starchy sediment.
PUMPKIN and WINTER SQUASH	Product should be cut in 1-inch cubes, not mashed or puréed. Look for uniform yellow to orange color, depending on variety. Liquid should be clear and free of starchy sediment.
SOUP MIX	Soups may consist of a mixture of vegetables, dried beans and peas, meat, poultry, or seafood. There should be a good mixture of ingredients. Jars should be filled with about half solids and half liquid. Pieces should be uniformly cut and have natural colors typical of the fresh products.
SWEET POTATOES	If small, may be canned whole. If larger, should be cut into pieces. Mashed or puréed product is not acceptable. Pieces should be uniform size and shape. Color may vary from yellow to orange, depending on variety, but should be uniform. Liquid should be clear and free of starchy sediment.
TOMATOES	Should appear firm, not mushy. Product should be evenly distributed throughout jar, not floating to top. It should be free from cores and green spots. There should be uniform, bright color characteristic of variety. Should have a good proportion of liquid to solid.
TOMATO JUICE	Should have a bright red, uniform color. Should have no visible seeds, peel, or other foreign particles. As tomato juice stands, slight separation of a clear liquid at the top may occur. If this separation is limited and if it is eliminated with a gentle shake, it may be considered acceptable.

Note: Cloudy liquid in vegetables may be a sign of spoilage, but it may be caused by the minerals in hard water or by starch from overripe vegetables.

Canned Fruit

Canned fruit should meet all the standards for high-quality canned products with regard to safety, container, pack, and appearance. Although there are a wide variety of fruits that are canned, the general scorecard below can be easily applied to each.

Fancy packs are discouraged; however, the most efficient use of space for a number of fruits, prepared as halves, is placing them in the jar in overlapping layers with the core/pit side down (called a shingle pack). Although this might be considered a fancy pack, it is acceptable since heat is easily transferred throughout a jar of product packed in this way.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Texture Firm, yet tender; characteristic of tree ripe but not overripe; edge of fruit smooth; free from dark places, peel pieces, or sediment of any kind; free of mushiness	35
Uniformity Pieces of same size and shape; color characteristic of fruit and uniform throughout; no discoloration; syrup clear*	30
Pack Good proportion of liquid to solids; jars filled to appropriate headspace of 1/2 inch; no floating fruit	25
Container Mason-type canning jar**; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed	10
Total Points	100

* Consistency of syrup may vary depending on ingredients and their proportions. Regardless of consistency, syrup should be sparkling clear. If fruit has caused the syrup to be colored, the color should be a natural color for the fruit. Artificial coloring is not allowed.

** If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Fruit Juices and Jellies

Fruit juice and jelly have very similar characteristics since jelly is made from fruit juice. Both products should have a clear, sparkling color characteristic of the fruit.

To judge color of both types of products, look through the jar toward a light. Products should be clear, with no sediment or suspended material. Color should be characteristic of the product.

The main difference in juice and jelly is in consistency. Juice should pour while jelly should be firm enough to hold shape of the container if turned out onto a plate. The best way to judge the consistency of jelly is to turn the jar on its side and give a single sharp shake. The jelly should pull away from the jar cleanly without breaking but should retain the shape of the jar.

Both must be in a Mason-type canning jar with a metal two-piece lid of appropriate size. Although sealing jelly with paraffin was once a standard practice, this is no longer recommended, and jellies sealed in this way are **not allowed** in fair competition.

The general scorecard for judging juices and jellies follows. Where there are differences in the two products, desirable characteristics for juice will be given first followed by those for jelly in italics.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Clearness Free from sediment, pulp, crystals, etc.	30
Consistency Juice: Flows freely, neither too thick or too watery <i>Jelly: Firm but tender, not sticky, gummy or syrupy; should hold shape but quiver slightly when jar is turned</i>	30
Appearance Attractive and characteristic of fruit; clear, sparkling, not dull	25
Container Mason-type canning jar*; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace of 1/4 inch	15
Total Points	100

*If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Other Sweet Spreads

Sweet spreads, such as jams, preserves, conserves, marmalades, and fruit butters, are all made from fruits preserved by sugar. Most are also jellied to some extent. Their individual characteristics depend on the kind of fruit used, the way it was prepared, the proportions of ingredients, and the method of cooking.

The similarities in the products allow them to be judged using the same standard scorecard. However, in order to completely evaluate this group of products, a judge must also be aware of how the different members of the group differ and consider these differences in making evaluations. A brief discussion of the characteristics of individual types of sweet spreads follows the scorecard.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Clearness Liquid should be clear but characteristic of fruit; free of sediment, defects, etc.; fruit in uniform pieces appropriately sized for product; fruit transparent in appearance	30
Consistency Liquid from consistency of honey to semi-jelly; pieces of fruit uniform, hold shape, appear tender and distributed uniformly throughout; good proportion of liquid and solids	30
Color Characteristic of fruit; free of discoloration; syrup clear and free of sediment	25
Container Mason-type canning jar*; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace of 1/4 inch	15
Total Points	100

*If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Judging Criteria for Individual Sweet Spreads

JAMS

Fruits crushed or ground to fine, uniform pieces and distributed evenly throughout a thick jelly-like syrup. Syrup may be gelled but is somewhat softer than jelly. There should be no free syrup.

PRESERVES

Very similar to jams except pieces of fruit are usually larger. Generally contain whole berries or small fruits. If larger fruit is used, fruit should be uniform, unbroken slices. Fruit is cooked translucent. It should be plump. If fig preserves, figs may be peeled or unpeeled. There should be a good proportion of fruit to syrup. Syrup should be the consistency of honey but may be a soft gel. Thin slices of lemon are acceptable additions to preserves.

MARMALADE

Tender jelly with small pieces of fruit distributed evenly throughout. Very similar to a preserve except that fruit has been divided into small, uniform pieces. May be a single fruit or a combination of fruits. The shape of fruit should be retained.

CONSERVE

A jam made from a mixture of fruits, usually including citrus fruit, and generally containing raisins and nuts. Fruits should be uniformly and attractively cut and recognizable.

FRUIT BUTTERS

The pulp of fruit which has been cooked to a smooth consistency that shows no separation of fruit and juice. The butter should move very slowly with a strong pull from the side of the container when turned to the side. It may move in a solid mass.

Pickled and Fermented Foods

The many varieties of pickled and fermented foods are classified by ingredients and methods of preparation.

Regular dill pickles and sauerkraut are fermented and cured for about three weeks. During curing, colors and flavors change and acidity develops. Fresh-pack or quick process pickles are not fermented; some are brined several hours or overnight, then drained and covered with vinegar and seasonings. Fruit pickles are usually prepared by heating seasoned syrup acidified with either lemon juice or vinegar. Relishes are made from chopped fruits and vegetables that are cooked with seasonings or vinegar. Specific points to consider in judging the types of fermented and pickled products follow the suggested scorecard.

It has been determined that enzymes in the blossom end of cucumbers may make pickles soft. For this reason, one good indication of acceptable texture of pickles is if a 1/16 inch slice has been removed from this end of the cucumber.

In the past, the presence of visible spice in a jar was considered a defect. Today, however, greater emphasis on practicality in preparation has caused a change in this thinking. This change means a reasonable amount of visible spice is now allowed.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Texture (See below for descriptions of specific products)	40
Color Even throughout and characteristic of product; fruit pickles bright in color; no artificial color added	25
Uniformity Pieces of same size and shape, not ground or chopped too finely; no ragged edges; liquid clear and free of sediment or defects of any kind; good proportion of liquid to pickles; presence of reasonable amount of spice acceptable; no floating pieces	20
Container Mason-type canning jar*; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed; appropriate headspace of 1/2 inch	15
Total Points	100

*If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Judging Criteria for Individual Pickled and Fermented Products

CUCUMBER AND MIXED PICKLES	Should be firm, crisp, and plump. Uniform dark green color showing thorough saturation of all pieces with pickling solution. In many instances, the pieces should have transparent or semi-transparent appearance. Pickles uniform in size. Small to medium size cucumbers generally used whole; large ones should be sliced into uniform size slices.
DILL PICKLES	Firm, crisp, and plump. Small to medium size cucumbers used whole; larger ones halved or quartered. Dill weed or seed and other spices visible. May contain cloves of garlic, which should be bright and not discolored. If fermented, liquid may be cloudy with slight sediment on bottom.
SWEET PICKLES	Should be firm yet tender, plump, and well saturated with the syrup. Small cucumbers may be left whole; large ones should be sliced. All should hold original shape. Syrup should be thick.
OTHER PICKLES (Not Cucumber)	Bright color, characteristic of produce used. Pieces uniform in size with no torn, broken, or ragged edges. Produce shows good saturation with liquid. Good proportion of liquid to solid. Appropriate garnish, such as onion ring, red pepper strip, etc., may be used.
RELISHES	Pieces should be small but large enough to be recognizable, not mushy, and uniform in size. In many instances, should be semi-transparent in appearance and hold sharp edge. Mixture should indicate thorough saturation with pickling solution. Good proportion of liquid to solids. Clear, bright color. Spices showing.
FRUIT PICKLES (Spiced Fruits)	Fruit uniform size, translucent, firm, and shows good penetration with syrup. Small fruits may be pickled whole; large fruit is cut into uniform pieces. Color of fruit is uniform, bright, and glossy. Syrup thinner than in preserves without being watery.
CHOW-CHOW	Mixture of finely chopped fresh vegetables – usually cabbage, green tomatoes, onions, and red and green peppers – cooked in vinegar-sugar-spice mixture. Cauliflower is optional ingredient. Characteristics similar to those of relish. Color should be bright yellowish-green.
CHUTNEY	Chopped fruit or fruit pulp mixed with chopped raisins and several chopped vegetables, such as onions, sweet peppers, and celery. Mixture is cooked with sugar, vinegar, and spice until thick. Texture similar to that of relish. Color is usually dark but depends on ingredients and spices used.
SAUERKRAUT	Color should be light straw to light amber and should be clear and bright. No pink, brown, or other discoloration. Pieces uniformly cut, transparent, and firm not mushy. Liquid clear and good proportion of liquid to solids. No air bubbles.

Meats, Poultry, Fish, and Game

Good quality meat, poultry, fish, and game meat may be canned. The meat should be trimmed of gristle and bruised spots before canning. Jar contents should have the color of the cooked product. The pieces should be somewhat uniform, and they should be sized for serving.

When judging, check the size of the fat layer on the top of the jar contents. A small amount is acceptable; however, excess fat indicates fat left on the meat. This fat can melt and climb the sides of the jar. If it comes in contact with the sealing compound on the lid, it may interfere with the formation of a good seal.

Characteristic	Points
Label Appropriate canning method and time listed	Yes (proceed to judging) No (disqualified)
Pack Jar filled to within 1 to 1 1/4 inches of top; pieces of meat placed lengthwise in container; good proportion of meat and liquid	20
Preparation of meat Excess fat and gristle removed; meat not floured or fried	20
Uniformity Pieces same size and shape; only one kind of meat in container; color characteristic of meat	25
Liquid Meat may or may not be covered with liquid; liquid should be clear and may be slightly jellied; less than 1/2 inch fat on chicken and beef and 1/4 inch on pork	25
Container Mason-type canning jar*; clear glass; clean; metal lid with seal; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed	10
Total Points	100

*If no published guidelines for size of jar, follow processing instructions for next larger size. If no instructions for a larger size jar are available, then disqualify entry.

Judging Criteria for Individual Meats, Poultry, Fish, and Game

POULTRY and RABBIT

Should be cut into suitable size pieces to fit jar. May be canned with or without bones. Liquid should be broth made from product.

BEAR, BEEF, LAMB, PORK, VEAL and VENISON

May be canned in strips, cubes, or chunks. Large bones should be removed; however, small bones may be included. May also be canned ground. Ground meat should be shaped into patties and browned before canning. May also be sautéed without shaping. Meat broth, water, or tomato juice are acceptable as canning liquids.

FINFISH and SHELLFISH

Finfish are generally split lengthwise and fillets cut to fit jar. Shellfish are removed from shells and packed in a manner best utilizing space in jar.

Dried Foods

Drying involves the removal of moisture from foods to stop microbial growth and prevent spoilage. The amount of moisture removed depends on the product; however, it must be sufficient to prevent spoilage.

Fruits have a high acid content, which also assists with preservation, so less moisture needs to be removed to preserve these products. For this reason, fruits are generally dried until they are tough yet pliable.

Vegetables are lower in acidity and, therefore, need more water removed to assure inhibition of bacterial growth. When adequately dried, they should be brittle or crisp.

Meat jerky is sufficiently dry when a piece will crack when bent without breaking in two. Lean meat with little connective tissue makes the highest quality jerky.

Packaging for dried foods should be such that moisture is not reabsorbed during storage. Most fairs require that dried foods be exhibited in glass jars since these display best at the fair. However, jars containing dried foods do not have to be sealed.

Characteristic	Points
Color Characteristic of product; free from excessive discoloration; uniform throughout display*	30
Uniformity of pieces Pieces same size and shape; no ragged edges	30
Uniform dryness No apparent moisture in container; pieces uniformly dry throughout	30
Container Standard canning jar; clear glass; clean; appropriate lid; lid and ring free of rust; screwband clean and easily removed. A seal is not mandatory.	10
Total Points	100

*Many fruits retain their color better if they are pretreated with sulfur. However, because some people are allergic to this chemical, such treatments are not required. Do not judge down a fruit that has darkened because sulfur was not used. Instead, note whether discoloration is excessive, indicating poor drying technique, and if color of sample is uniform.

In Summary

Learning to be an effective judge in any area at the fair is an ongoing process. Working through this chapter has familiarized you with some of the details of judging preserved foods and is an excellent start. But it will take more than once through this material to become really expert.

Each time you judge a fair, you will grow in your ability to judge effectively. So take every opportunity you can to judge.

Studying fair catalogs is another excellent way to familiarize yourself with the categories in which products may be entered. It is interesting to look at the differences in the way fairs are set up and the kinds of categories they use. Another great resource is *Judging Home Preserved Foods* by the National Center for Home Food Preservation and the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

Learning more about how to preserve a particular product is an excellent way of preparing to judge. Please review 2009 USDA's *Complete Guide to Home Canning* and the fourth and fifth editions of *So Easy to Preserve* for more details.

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