

## Do I have to use Mason jars for canning, or may I use mayonnaise or tomato sauce jars I've saved?

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For home canning, no matter if using a boiling water method or pressure canner, mason-type jars specifically made for home canning are best. They're manufactured specifically to accommodate the high temperatures and/or long processing times required in home canning. Just as recipe and sealing instructions have been updated since our moms and grandmothers canned, so too have the jars and lids. The old-style jars that had a zinc cap or glass lid, rubber gasket and metal clamp are not recommended. Other considerations are noted in the information below from the National Center for Home Food Preservation.

“Regular and wide-mouth Mason-type, threaded, home-canning jars with self-sealing lids are the best choice. They are available in ½ pint, pint, 1½ pint, quart, and ½ gallon sizes. The standard jar mouth opening is about 2-3/8 inches. Wide-mouth jars have openings of about 3 inches, making them more easily filled and emptied. Half-gallon jars may be used for canning very acid juices. Regular-mouth decorator jelly jars are available in 8 and 12 ounce sizes. With careful use and handling, Mason jars may be reused many times, requiring only new lids each time. When jars and lids are used properly, jar seals and vacuums are excellent and jar breakage is rare.

“Most commercial pint- and quart-size mayonnaise or salad dressing jars may be used with new two-piece lids for canning acid foods. However, you should expect more seal failures and jar breakage. These jars have a narrower sealing surface and are tempered less than Mason jars, and may be weakened by repeated contact with metal spoons or knives used in dispensing mayonnaise or salad dressing. Seemingly insignificant scratches in glass may cause cracking and breakage while processing jars in a canner. **Mayonnaise-type jars are not recommended for use with foods to be processed in a pressure canner because of excessive jar breakage. Other commercial jars with mouths that cannot be sealed with two-piece canning lids are not recommended for use in canning any food at home.**”

*Source: USDA, National Center for Home Food Preservation, [https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/general/recomm\\_jars\\_lids.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/general/recomm_jars_lids.html), 8-28-20.*

Any jars that are used for canning should be clean (not sterile unless processing time is less than 10 minutes), and checked for defects, such as chips or nicks along the top, sealing edge, that could prevent jars from sealing. Check jars, also, for cracks or excessive scratching on the inside surface.

During storage, old jars may have been banged around a bit, or metal utensils may have been used in them leaving etchings that can make the jars weaker. Old jars that look cloudy should be gently boiled in a vinegar and water solution. If the cloudiness disappears the problem was probably residue from canning in hard water, and these jars may be used for future canning. However, if the cloudiness remains, it could be a sign of soft water etching or scratches remaining from use of metal utensils. These jars are more likely to crack during canning.

Some tomato sauce jars contain the word “Mason” on the jar, so they would be appropriate, however some of those are not a full quart (32 oz.) size. Processing times are made for the standard size jars noted above. These jars can be used, but they would have to be processed for the same time as quart jars, resulting in some over processing. Over processing yields safe but lower quality food.

**Lids and Rings** – The USDA has tested and recommended two-piece lids. Most of the canning jars sold today come with two-piece, self-sealing lids and screw bands. The flat lid can be used only once for home canning. Once this lid is opened, it should be only used for leftover storage or recycled. The screw bands can be used repeatedly, if they are not bent or show rust. If the band is irregular it cannot apply even pressure to hold the lid in place during processing, and the lid may not seal. The life of bands is prolonged by removing them from jars once the lid is sealed and storing them perfectly dry between uses.

Other lid systems, including one-piece metal lids and two-sided reusable lids, do not negatively affect the microbiological safety of food during the canning process. Therefore, choosing other lid systems that will assure success in sealing and maintaining vacuum and food quality during storage were approved by USDA (in 2014), although seal longevity was not determined.