

Fruit preserving using sealed jars

Kitchen notes prepared for the [Sustainable Living Education Trust](#)
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The commonly found preserving jars by makers such as *Agee* come in two types. The older thicker-glass type has a surrounding ledge just below the screw thread and these jars require gold coloured screw bands. The Gold bands that are sold also fit the American Mason jars. The newer '*Agee Improved*' preserving jars have green screw bands.

Alternative imported preserving jars are sold in supermarkets at about \$4.15 each but the *Agee* jars are available in garage sales and on [TradeMe](#) auctions for lower unit prices. (Example of recent auction: 12 *Agee Improved* jars sold for \$36 and were offered at a reserve price of \$15).

The green screw bands and metal/rubber disc seal lids from *Perfit* are available from supermarkets. If they are not in stock, ask your supermarket to order them in from the supplier (perfit@xtra.co.nz)

If you can afford to, use new seal lids each time for reliability, but to save money and resources they can be re-used, although failure rates increase! One person's tip is to open them vary carefully, without bending the disc: "the secret when removing lids is to use the back of a bread & butter knife (not sharp) and slide this carefully up the glass screw grooves until you reach the lid...then tilt the knife and the lid will pop off without damage. Wash and store lids dry in a plastic pottle or the cut off base of a lemonade bottle. Keep off dust. If lids are fully dry they will keep for several years and perhaps 2 more uses. The risk of the airtight seal failing increases with each re-use.

Sterilization is important. Heat carefully washed and rinsed jars in the oven, dry, at 90 (for cold fill method) up to 105 deg C (for hot fill method) and also briefly simmer the metal lids in boiling water before use (and use tongs or tweezers to handle these). Keep your hands clean, perhaps wear washable rubber gloves. Remember that bacteria or yeast from your fingers should be kept off the lid or any inside glass surfaces. Kitchen implements should also be sterilized using boiling water.

However, if you plan to place the filled jar in a hot water bath and cook it there (for at least 15 mins- times vary according to fruit type), any bacteria or yeast that got inside should be killed by the bottling heat process - see cold fill method, below.

Wearing oven gloves, take each empty jar one at a time from the oven and stand on a heavy wooden bread board (which may have a sheet of kitchen paper across it, that you'd later compost) or on a folded teatowel (which you'd later wash). Avoid plastic mats, which might melt.

Meanwhile prepare the syrup to cover the fruit you are bottling. In preference, I use clear apple juice concentrate, a little raw organic sugar and organic manuka honey, but a white-sugar light syrup (1 cup sugar to 3 of water) is the cheapest option. The sugar syrup acts as a preservative, but do try not to make it over-sweet, as reduced sugar is less fattening!

Hot fill method

Cook the fruit in clean water, not sugared, for long enough to sterilize it but not until it falls apart into a mush. This is not jam-making! Wear rubber gloves, to protect you from splashes. Bring each hot jar from the oven onto a wooden board or folded tea towel (providing a low-slip insulated surface) and fill it quickly with hot, near-boiling fruit, drained using a sterilized perforated or slotted spoon, so that relatively little liquid is transferred. Cover the fruit with syrup, using a sterilized small ladle. Tap the jar and/or poke in a sterilized long blade knife, to dislodge bubbles. Fill right to the very top of the jar, so that it overflows a little. Immediately place the metal sealing lid on the jar, rubber seal facing downwards, and screw down the metal screw-band, which is clean and has been very lightly vegetable-oiled on the inside, using a freshly-oiled piece of otherwise clean cloth or paper, for ease of band removal later. Stand jars out of draughts to cool slowly and completely. Avoid knocking them: no more tapping required!

After about 24 hours, check to make sure each seal lid has domed inwards, pulled by the vacuum, unscrew the bands and wipe the outside of the jars clean, to remove any syrup that would otherwise grow mould, label with date and contents and store jars in a dark place for up to a year. Check your jars occasionally in the following weeks to ensure that seals have survived, especially if you have been re-using old lids (see note above)

Cold fill (hot water bath) method

Wear clean rubber gloves. Pack the washed but raw and cold fruit, which may be peeled, stoned and halved or sliced, into the warm dry jar. Take these jars from the oven one at a time onto a wooden board or folded tea towel. Use gloves for safety. The fruit filled jars then have hot syrup added to fill them, are lidded and screw banded as above, and immersed in a bath of hot water on thermostat at over 85 degrees.Centigrade for sufficient time to cook and sterilise the jar contents - this may be 20 minutes or more.

Times to maintain this high temperature:

10 mins for rhubarb

15 mins for lemons and other citrus; berries; guava.

20 mins for apples, apricots, peaches, plums, kiwifruit; tamarillo; feijoa

40 mins for quinces

After removal from the hot water, the jar's screw band is tightened gently. Check for seal success a day later once cooled. Wipe the outside, label and store as above.

A variation on this approach involves heating the jars once filled on a flat tray in an oven. Temperature control is less exact and they may boil. Beware jars falling over & spilling if put direct on oven wire racks. I have found it a less successful method.

It is also possible to cook the jar contents in a microwave, but I'm not personally a fan of that approach. Again, the contents tend to boil. Syrup and glass fragments from exploding non-microwavable old jars are hard to clean out from microwave interiors!