University of California Cooperative Extension
Master Food Preserver

Food Thermometer Calibration

Part 1 of 2

A THERMOMETER IS ONLY HELPFUL IF IT'S ACCURATE

A kitchen thermometer is one of the best tools to have on hand to ensure quality and safety when cooking and preserving. They comes in a variety of types, from dial-stem meat thermometers to glass candy thermometers to digital thermometers with wireless remotes. Since even a few degrees can make the difference between over- or underdone meat or overcooked jams or candies, testing for accuracy is important.

Fortunately, it's easy to test a thermometer, and some – such as stem thermometers with hex nuts under the dial or digital thermometers with reset buttons – can even be physically recalibrated so that they read accurately.

There are two calibration testing methods: the **ice water method** (used for cold processes) and the **boiling water method** (used for hot processes). In general, it's most accurate to calibrate your thermometer closest to the temperature for which it will be used. So if, for instance, you're checking the temperature of a pot of boiling jam, using the boiling water method is preferable. That said, many people prefer to use the ice water method because it's easier and you don't need to worry about altitude adjustments – water freezes at 32°F regardless of elevation. If you find that your readings are getting drastically off, it's probably time for a new thermometer. For the how-to's, see our companion poster *How to Calibrate a Food Thermometer*.

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