

# Preserve It: Canning Basics



## Hot Pack vs. Raw Pack – Meat

### THE PROS, CONS, AND LIMITATIONS FOR CANNING MEAT & POULTRY

Hot pack and raw pack refers to the method of packing food into jars prior to canning. There are advantages and disadvantages to each method; when both options are given, the one you choose comes down to personal preference.

In hot packing meat, the food is par-cooked or browned and filled loosely into hot jars, and topped to cover with hot liquid. The benefits of the hot pack method for canning meat include: the pre-cooking/browning step shrinks the meat so more food can fit in the jar; the browning adds flavor; added liquids improve quality; and flavor can be enhanced when broth, meat drippings or tomato juice are used as the covering liquid. The hot pack method is generally preferred for the best quality of meat during storage, however some people find that the browning process changes the texture of more delicate meats, such as chicken, and is less desirable.

In raw packing meat, uncooked meat is packed loosely into hot jars. Raw packing meat requires less preparation and thus is quicker. During processing, raw-packed meat shrinks (a lot!) as it releases its natural fats and juices. This liquid, however, is usually not enough to cover the meat. Between the meat shrinkage and lack of liquid, a large amount of empty space ends up being left in the jar. As long as the jar seals appropriately, safety is not a concern, though some find the partly empty jar looks a bit unsightly. Also, the exposed fat could turn rancid over time. For these reasons, hot packing is generally preferred for the best quality during storage.

Summary tips:

- **When only one option is given for the type of pack, use only that option.**
- **No matter the packing method, always fill product into hot jars.**
- **Preheat the canner to 140°F for raw pack food or 180°F for hot pack food.**
- **Meat and poultry must be processed in a pressure canner.** Always choose a recipe from a reliable resource and check it carefully for specific preparation and processing recommendations.

*For further information on preserving, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) at <https://nchfp.uga.edu> or contact your local Cooperative Extension office.*

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