

Goals for Judging Preserved Foods

“Judging” in competitive events is a term that implies a qualified person makes decisions based on standards of quality. However, judging not only produces a ranking or score of a product against these standards, it also affects the person who has created the product. There are a lot of emotions and feelings of self-esteem or worth wrapped up in an entry of homemade foods. A judge has an important role in helping create a positive growth experience. The development of people is a priority concern. Projects should be viewed as a means to an end – not an end in themselves.

Two major purposes for judging include:

1. To judge the quality of the project or exhibit. Judging the entry involves the objective appraisal of the finished product in a uniform way.
 2. To contribute to the learning experience of the exhibitor. Contributing to the exhibitor’s learning experience is equally important. It can show that the amount of effort expended in developing the entry is valued. It also represents an interest in, and valuing of, the person. The learning experience of the exhibitor can be enhanced by personal notes from, or contact with, the judges.
- No exhibit is so poorly done that it is not worthy of an encouraging comment.
 - No exhibit is so well done that some improvement may not be made.

Methods of Judging

Judging Systems

There are basically two systems of judging that are commonly used in fair judging, the American System and the Danish System. Check with the superintendent or agent in charge before you begin judging to clarify which system you will be using and how many placings you will be required to make.

American System - Exhibits in this system are compared against a standard of perfection, as well as against the other entries in the competition. All exhibits in a particular class are looked at and ranked with only one selected for first place, second place, third place, etc. If there are no high quality exhibits, at the judge’s discretion, exhibits may be placed in the appropriate position, even if it is second or third place.

Danish System - In this system all exhibitors receive a ribbon. All exhibits are grouped according to quality, and there may be multiple entries that get the same ranking and ribbon. Quality may vary from excellent to fair, and ribbon categories may be blue, red, white and/or yellow. In this system of judging, exhibits are not in competition with or compared to each other.

There is no formula to determine the number of ribbons to be given in the Danish System. Quality determines the ranking for blue, red, white and/or yellow ribbon. A blue ribbon is generally recognized and used for excellence. Red ribbons are given for an adequate exhibit that does not meet all the standards. White and/or yellow ribbons are given when the exhibit is below standard quality and improvement is definitely needed. Under the Danish system, participation ribbons are given to recognize the efforts of the exhibitor.

Types of Judging

There are two types of judging commonly used in county fairs and competitive events – open judging and closed judging.

Open judging is an open assessment by the judge before a group about the items in the exhibit. The exhibitors may be present. All exhibitors benefit from the discussion in open judging, although extra care must be taken so that the judge's comments do not embarrass exhibitors or cause unnecessarily hurt feelings.

Closed judging is done in a private area, where only the officials are allowed until the judging is completed. This is usually done when there are a large number of items in the exhibit, and/or when there is not enough room for spectators to listen to open judging. The judging is conducted prior to the opening of the event. In some judging situations, score sheets are provided for judges to record comments for the exhibitor about the qualities desired and standards used for judging.

Judges should:

- Be attractively dressed and well groomed.
- Have a pleasant manner; smile; be prompt.
- Be flexible; anticipate changes in time needed to do the job right, for example.
- Understand the abilities and tastes of the age level of competitors that are being judged.
- Be tactful and concerned about the participants and their feelings.
- Offer compliments and constructive criticism.
- Avoid being flippant or sarcastic.
- Hide personal likes and dislikes.
- Make quick and firm decisions.
- Avoid consulting with spectators.
- Avoid talking about other fairs they have judged.
- Be familiar with the products being judged.
- Keep up-to-date with current techniques and trends.
- Make comments that will help the individual improve.
- Be as consistent as possible.
- Recognize quality standards.
- Give the exhibitor the benefit of the doubt.
- Offer reasons for decisions, when appropriate.

Comments from Judges

Not all situations allow for recording or making comments to the exhibitor. This is unfortunate because the judge's comments are an important part of the judging process. An exhibitor benefits from learning his/her strengths and weaknesses and receiving suggestions for changes. When permitted, one of the main goals of the judge's comments to the exhibitor should be to help the exhibitor feel pride and accomplishment in the project, as well as to obtain ideas for improvement.

Each judge should remember to:

- Judge the item, not the exhibitor. Help participants feel more positive about themselves as a result of the experience.
- Be consistent. Judge all projects against the same standards.
- Start comments with a positive remark. Write remarks for improvement and try to inspire the exhibitor for future work. Consider individual capabilities and levels of experience.
- Keep an open mind about methods/techniques. Don't consider just one technique or method as being acceptable if there are other acceptable options.
- Encourage the exhibitors to analyze their own work. Ask how their work might be changed or if other methods could be used for more satisfying results.
- Inspire the exhibitor to plan ahead for future successful projects.

Decisions About the Competition

SAFETY the Primary Consideration

Individuals usually enter their preserved foods in contests because of pride in their creative activity – and because it's fun! However, safety must be a consideration in recognizing quality home food preservation activities and products. Judging and competitive events can actually be opportunities to teach people about safe food preservation methods.

Safety of the food should be the primary consideration when awarding honors to food preservation entries. It is a consideration, however, that makes judging preserved foods more difficult than some other types of entries. Unsafe methods should not be rewarded and the exhibitors should not leave the event thinking that their unsafe methods are approved and can be shared with others.

There are some characteristics of the preserved food that can be used in evaluating its safety even if it does not look obviously spoiled. Each jar of a canned food, for example, should be labeled with the processing time and method used (i.e., boiling water or pressure canning at how many pounds pressure). Types of jars and lids used should be a

consideration, as should the condition of the jar and lid. Post processing leaks in canned foods can be detected in even apparently sealed jars if the screw band is removed. Judges should be allowed to disqualify entries that are not labeled with an appropriate process, have not used USDA or Extension-endorsed canning methods and processing times, or that show common signs of spoilage, such as cloudy liquids, bubbling and unsealed lids not labeled with an appropriate process, have not used USDA or Extension-endorsed canning methods and processing times, or that show common signs of spoilage, such as cloudy liquids, bubbling and unsealed lids.

Additional Considerations for Canned Foods

1. Canned products should be prepared and processed according to current USDA/Extension Service information. **Event organizers should not offer classes (or entry categories) for which there are not scientific research-based processes available.** The county Cooperative Extension Service is a good source to make sure you have the most up-to-date USDA information.
2. Canned products must be canned in clear, standard (half-pint, pint or quart) jars in good condition with new, two-piece canning lids (flat lid and band). (Note: There are now 12-ounce canning jars available. If there is not a USDA recommended process time available for the 12-ounce jar, these may be used with a pint jar canning process recommendation. The process time for pints cannot be reduced for the smaller jar size, however. If there is only a USDA process for a half-pint jar size, then a 12-ounce jar would be disqualified for lack of a recommended USDA process time.)
3. Jar sizes for which there are no USDA canning recommendations will not be judged.
4. Jams, jellies, marmalades and preserves sealed with paraffin will not be judged; these products must be heat sealed (canned).
5. Fancy padded lids, fabric over wraps or cozies interfere with the judging process and should not be used.

Judging Home Canned Foods

Basics of Acceptable Entries

Rules for acceptable entries and scoring methods will differ among fairs. It is very important that the judge review the catalog of a fair or event ahead of time, in order to make certain that the rules of the current fair or event are considered in making determinations.

Judging preserved foods requires study, training, and good judgment. Judges must be knowledgeable about food preservation and must know what the various types of products should look like if they are of prize winning quality.

Ideally, a scorecard should be completed for each exhibit. However, if there are a large number of entries, completing a scorecard for each one is often too time consuming. It is, therefore, important that judges become very familiar with the criteria associated with the various types of preserved foods in order to judge them accurately without a scorecard.

Processing Method and Recipe

The first thing to consider is the processing method and choice of foods. The label should have a time and temperature (boiling water or pressure process) combination that is recommended for that food in the latest edition of the USDA *Complete Guide to Home Canning* or state Extension Service publication. Event organizers should not offer classes (entry categories) for which there are not scientific research-based processes available. If the event is sponsored by an association or company that has their own published canning directions, these may be included in allowed processes. (However, if there is any question as to the reliability and scientific basis of the recommendations, the best practice would be to have these processes reviewed by a competent authority to determine if they might be unsafe.)

- 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.
- Acid and appropriately acidified foods (expected pH less than 4.6) such as pickles may be processed in a boiling water canner. 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 “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 USDA or other recognized scientific source can be documented.

Containers

Clear, clean standard (usually half-pint, pint or quart) home canning jars in good condition with two-piece metal canning lids (flat lid and band) must be used. Regular or wide-mouth styles may be used. The jar size should match available processing recommendations. For example, USDA does not have processes for some foods in quart jars such as fish, mushrooms, cream style corn, and marinated peppers.

There are 12-ounce canning jars with the recommended two-piece metal canning lids (flat lid and band) available. Their popularity is increasing for use with jams, jellies and fruit butters as well as some other preserves. If there is not a USDA recommended process time specifically for the 12-ounce jar, the pint jar canning process time is to be used under current USDA recommendations. The process time for pints cannot be reduced for the smaller jar size, however. If the USDA canning recommendations only provide a process for

a half-pint jar size, then a 12-ounce jar would be disqualified for lack of a recommended USDA process time.)

Commercial jars such as the ones used for mayonnaise, peanut butter, coffee, tomato sauces, pickles, and jelly should not be allowed in the entry rules. Many of these jars cannot be recommended for home canning. Irregular shapes and volumes of jars can cause inadequate heat penetration during processing and an unsafe product may result. In addition, many of these jars are more likely to break during processing and are less likely to seal properly. If a product is canned in an unacceptable container it should not be judged.

Today's home canning lid of choice is the two-piece lid consisting of a flat metal lid held in place by a metal band. The flat lids must be brand new each time a jar is filled. It should show no signs of rusting, or of food and liquid dried onto the outside. Dried food or liquid residues can mean the jar and lid were not washed and dried after processing. They also might mean the jar is not sealed properly and leaked during transport to or during the competition. While an unwashed jar and lid may not indicate unsafe food, it does show lack of attention to detail and makes a poor appearance, which are important considerations in a competitive event.

Bands should be clean and free of rust. They should not be bent or misshapen. The judge needs to loosen the band to check under it for cleanliness. Removing the band also allows the judge to see that there is a proper amount of headspace in the jar (which is discussed below under *Pack*). Points should be deducted for rusty, dented or misshapen, or corroded lids. If a band is rusted or corroded into place so that it cannot be removed, the jar should not be judged.

Once it has been determined that the appropriate type of jar and lid have been used, the judge must make sure that the jar has a vacuum seal. This can be 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. Another way to test the seal is 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 upwards.

If a lid is bulging as if there is unnatural pressure inside the jar pushing it upwards, the jar should not be opened, even if sealed. Breaking the seal of a bulging lid could force the contents, especially liquids, to come spraying out onto the judge and other surfaces. A lid bulging in this way is a sign of potentially unsafe food and the jar should not be judged.

A buckled lid is one that is sealed but has a crease across a section or edge. Buckled lids do not occur with good canning practices, but are a sign that jars were not filled properly and/or lids were not properly tightened. These vacuum seals are likely to loosen during storage. Jars with buckled lids should have points deducted if the competition does not want to disqualify them for judging.

The old style, bail-type closures and porcelain-lined zinc caps are no longer considered acceptable. Zinc caps make it difficult to gauge the amount of headspace in a jar and hide

darkening of food that might occur at the surface when jars of food are not opened during judging. Jars with these types of lids should not be judged.

Jars must be clean and free of mineral deposits. Recognize that handling in transit to the fair and by fair workers may have resulted in smudges on the jars. It should be fairly easy to distinguish between jars that were cleaned but now have fingerprints and jars that were not clean to start with.

Pack

Headspace is the empty space between the food in a jar and its lid. It is important to maintain proper headspace because it can affect safety as well as quality of the food. If adequate headspace was not allowed, food could expand enough during processing to be squeezed out between the jar and lid. The appearance of a sealed lid in these jars may actually be the result of sticky or dried food holding the lid in place. Also, when very acid foods remain in contact with the underside of the lid, pinholing or corrosion might be the result. A jar with absolutely no headspace, or an extremely small headspace compared to recommended allowances (see below), may be disqualified or have points deducted.

Too much headspace may mean excess air (oxygen) has remained in the jar. This can lead to excessive darkening during storage. It can also lead to a reduced vacuum level in the jar, which means a weaker seal. It is at least a waste of jar space and contributes to a loss of quality. Points should be deducted for poor headspace control even in sealed jars.

Recommended headspace allowances are as follows:

- ¼ inch for jams and jellies
- ¼ inch for apple juice, grape juice and fruit purees
- ½ inch for other fruit products, pickles, and tomatoes processed in a water bath canner
- 1 inch for USDA fruit pie fillings with Clear Jel®; ½ inch for green tomato pie filling
- 1 inch for vegetables, meats, or other products processed in a pressure canner (1¼ to 1½ inches for quart jars of fresh lima beans; see individual directions)
- 1 ¼ inches for poultry

The manner in which the food is packed in the jar is important. The most important consideration in judging the pack of canned food is its safety. Food must be packed into the jar in a way that allows heat to easily penetrate throughout the jar's contents. To do so there must be a proper balance of solids and liquids. If there are too many solids present, then the heat will not be able to penetrate through the mass. The liquid should cover the product and be able to circulate freely throughout the jar.

Excess liquid, or very loose packs of solids, is a waste of jar space. While this is not a safety issue, it is not practical. This practice should influence scoring in a competitive situation as a less than desirable method. Points should be deducted for excessive liquid in a solid food pack.

Many types of fancy packs produce potentially unsafe products. In many events, they are not allowed. The adequacy of process times is dependent on using specified preparation procedures. For example, if the preparation instructions specify cutting into pieces, the vegetable should not be left whole. Fancy packs that allow for dense packing of food pieces may not have received adequate heat penetration to kill harmful microorganisms. An example would be snap beans, asparagus or cucumber spears, or carrots carefully hand-placed to produce a tight, vertical pack. This kind of practice also allows the food temperature to cool down too much if a hot pack process is intended and used. Process times are dependent on an expected initial temperature of the food as it goes into the canner. At the least, packs of this type are not considered practical or representative of recommended jar filling practices.

Appearance of Contents

The quality of the fresh food being canned and the care with which it is handled are the major factors influencing the appearance of the canned product. The fresh product should have been canned when it was young and tender. It should have no defects such as blemishes, decayed spots, or sunburned spots. It should have been at its peak level of ripeness when canned. Over-mature produce can result in mushy or discolored canned food.

The canned food should be in piece sizes and shapes that are appropriate to the particular product (recommended in processing directions). The pieces should be uniform in size. For example, peach halves should not be mixed with peach slices. This adds to the appearance of the product while assuring uniform cooking in preparation of hot packs – and good fills for expected heat penetration. Consistency of piece sizes in pickles, relishes, mixed vegetables and fruit preserves is considered a quality characteristic to be determined by the judge.

If processing recommendations call for peeled fruit or vegetables, food with peels and skins should be disqualified. Peels and skins can carry high numbers of microorganisms. Including them in recipes where this practice is not recommended can lead to survival of potentially harmful microorganisms.

The texture of the product should appear tender but not mushy. The product should hold its shape and show no signs of overcooking. Edges of food pieces can be examined carefully to detect signs of mushiness or excessive softness.

Any liquid in the canned product (sugar syrup covering fruit pieces, brines in pickles, meat juices, etc.) should be fairly clear and free of cloudiness or sediment. Starchy vegetables may have a slightly cloudy liquid but there should not be a starchy sediment. It is acceptable for the liquid in foods with dark-colored water soluble pigments, such as tomatoes and berries, to have a color characteristic of the product rather than being colorless.

The color of the canned product should be that of a well cooked product. Foods that look raw or just cut most likely have not been processed at all. The color should be uniform and should show no signs of over- or under-processing. Darkening of food pieces is undesirable

quality and can result from too much air being trapped in headspace, use of raw packs, excessively tight bands during canning, or poor quality raw food.

In some products, such as sweet corn, variety can lead to differences in cooked color. Some varieties just do not lend themselves well to good color after canning. Varieties with high sugar content can turn extremely brown from the high heat of pressure canning. The judge will need to decide how much to factor discoloration into his or her scoring.

There should be no foreign particles or sediment in the jar. Foreign matter that should be rated as defects include strings, pits, seeds, skins, stems and cores. Meat entries should not have obvious gristle or tendons.

There should be a minimum amount of air bubbles present. The acceptable quantity and size of air bubbles will vary considerably with the product. This is an instance where a judge needs to be knowledgeable about typical appearance of high quality canned foods. Finally, there should be no bubbles that appear to be gas produced by active microorganisms or other signs of spoilage.

Attractiveness

An exhibitor in a competitive event can, and should, expect the judges to use subjective decisions about attractiveness of the display – especially if competition is close. The cleanliness of the containers and lids will influence subjective decisions. Neatness and cleanliness of labels will also play a role in overall impression of the entry. Exhibitors should give consideration to the following as contributions to attractiveness of the entry: naturalness and brightness of the color, good proportions of solids to liquids, absence of excessive air, no darkening of food at the top of the jar, headspace, and shininess of the lid and band. If fair rules call for more than one jar of the product to be submitted, both jars should be of the same type and size of container. The contents in multiple jars should be consistent or similar in appearance.

Labels

Labels on preserved foods should be clean, neat, easy to read, and contain all information required by the event's guidelines. Judges should be alert to signs that old labels have been removed and replaced with new labels. Some exhibitors neglect to clean off all remnants of old adhesive, for example. Original labels can sometimes be seen through new labels, especially when held in an appropriate level of lighting.

Judging by Appearance vs. Tasting

In many events, canned foods are not opened during judging. In fact, as previously stated, it is recommended that no food be tasted with the possible exception of jams, jellies or flavored vinegars. Consequently, a judge must rely on visual inspection of the food inside the jar to judge characteristics like flavor and texture. The descriptions above have shown just how much can be judged by appearance.

To review, safety is judged by appearance in the following ways:

- Use of recommended jars and lids.
- Use of recommended processing methods and times, as well as intended preparation style for the given process.
- Use of recommended headspace and pack style.
- Proper balance of solids and liquids.
- Lids that are clean and new; bands that are not rusted or corroded.
- Absence of non-recommended ingredients such as noodles, rice, flour, oils.
- Absence of gas bubbles, cloudiness, sediments and foreign material.
- Absence of stains, other signs of leaking.

Quality is judged by appearance and the following characteristics:

- Flavor of vegetables is usually indicated by the maturity of the product and its general appearance rather than directly judged by taste.
- Over-maturity is judged by appearance:
 - excess starchiness (peas and beans),
 - softness or mushiness (fruits, some vegetables,)
 - large or loose distribution of seeds in cucumber products (e.g., are the seeds loose and floating around or still intact in the food piece, are they larger than is normal for optimum ripeness),
 - discoloration of seeds (yellowish or pale in cucumbers, dark or brown to pinkish in snap beans),
 - sprouting of seeds (tomatoes),
 - browning of cut edges (snap beans),
 - dull, unnatural colors.
- Poor color control or lack of appropriate pretreatments is judged by browning on edges of light-colored fruits.
- Poor choice of raw pack over hot pack is indicated by excessive trapped air bubbles, floating of food pieces above covering liquid, and darkening of food at the surface.
- Overcooking is indicated by poor color and mushiness.
- Artificial coloring is usually considered undesirable except for some specific specialty recipes. Using it when not necessary makes it difficult to observe some signs of spoilage or loss of quality in storage. Some may use it to cover poor raw product quality, over-mature vegetables, and re-packing of formerly canned foods.
- Attractiveness and attention to detail are judged by:
 - Consistency and appropriateness of piece size.
 - Absence of foreign matter, seeds, pits, peel, root hairs on vegetables, stems.
 - Good, characteristic, natural and bright colors, as well as freedom from discoloration.
 - Lids that are clean and dry; bands that are not rusted, corroded, bent or misshapen.
 - Neatness and attractiveness of exhibit.

Judging Canned Fruits and Juices

Headspace for fruits should be ½ inch. Apple juice, grape juice and fruit purees use ¼ inch headspace.

Canned fruit should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness. Although the variety of fruits that are canned include many textures, shapes and colors, there is general information that can be applied to each, as well as some specific considerations for some fruits. The consistency of syrup in a jar of canned fruit may vary depending on ingredients and their proportions. Heavier sugar syrups will be thicker and sometimes have a little color compared to light sugar syrups. Regardless of consistency or color, syrup should be clear. If fruit has caused syrup to be colored, the color should be the natural color of the fruit. Artificial coloring is discouraged and should not be allowed in entry guidelines.

Desirable General Characteristics for Fruits

Size and Shape	Uniform pieces of same to similar size and shape; clean-cut edges.
Pack	Attractive; neat; space well used. Good proportion of solids to liquids. Liquid covers all product with ½ inch headspace. No floating fruit. Fancy packs are generally discouraged; however, the most efficient use of space for many halved fruits is placing them in the jar in overlapping layers with the core or pit side down. Although some may initially think of this as a fancy pack, it is acceptable and desirable as an efficient pack for rounded or large halves of fruit.
Texture	Fruit pieces have appearance of being well-ripened and not overripe, firm yet tender. Shape well preserved, free of mushiness.
Color	Natural coloring; no artificial coloring; uniform. Free from bruises, brown spots, mold, or discoloration; no undue bleaching or darkening.
Liquid	Clear, bright. Suitable consistency of syrup for product. No sediment, cloudiness, or bubbles. No foreign matter.
Container	Properly labeled. Appropriate size for available recommended canning processes. Clean, clear standard canning jar. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

Common Problems	Probable Causes
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Fruit soft and mushy	Over-ripe product. Overcooking.
Fruit looks hard	Under-ripe product.

Darkened fruit	<p>Surface darkening from air in headspace when fruit is not completely covered by liquid.</p> <p>Too much air left in headspace from under- or no processing.</p> <p>Too much air trapped in pack from use of raw pack.</p> <p>Over processing can cause darkening throughout the jar.</p>
Floating of fruit	<p>Fruit was packed too loosely.</p> <p>Syrup is too heavy.</p> <p>Raw pack was used and air in the fruit tissue itself could not all be exhausted during processing.</p> <p>Over-ripe fruit.</p>
Jar underfilled	<p>Raw pack was used; fruit shrunk during processing.</p> <p>Jar was not packed with proper attention to detail.</p>
Sediment in bottom of jar	<p>Over-ripe fruit.</p> <p>Hard water.</p>
Bubbles	<p>Small amount: from moving or shaking jar.</p> <p>Occasional bubble trapped among halves or large pieces.</p> <p>Larger amounts: trapped air from raw packs or excessive tightening of ring bands.</p> <p>Bubbles rising through the product (syrup) can indicate fermentation is taking place and the jar should be disqualified.</p>

Judging Criteria for Individual Fruits

Apples	<p>No seeds, core or peel. Canned as slices or sauce. Only hot pack is recommended. Raw packs trap an excessive amount of air, fruit floats, and browning is common over time from both these problems.</p>
Apricots	<p>May be peeled or the skin left on. Canned as halves or slices. Skin with dark spots should be removed. Fruit should be firm without signs of mushiness.</p>
Berries	<p>Uniform color to all the berries. No stems. Pack should be full with good solids-to-liquid ratio. Liquid should be bright and clear although it may be colored by the fruit pigments. No sediment or signs of fermentation bubbling. No floating of fruit above liquid.</p>
Cherries	<p>Pack should be full with good solids-to-liquid ratio. Liquid should be bright and clear although it may be colored by the fruit pigments. No floating of fruit above liquid. If pitted, cuts or holes are neat and not destructive of the fruit's shape. No stem-end discoloration or discoloration where cut or pitted. If canned unpitted, skins have been pricked to prevent splitting.</p>

Figs	Canned without peeling and with small stem attached. Firm and uncracked; no signs of mushiness. Color depends on variety, but should be characteristic of optimum ripeness for variety. Only hot pack is recommended. Lemon juice (1 tablespoon per pint) or citric acid (¼ teaspoon per pint) should have been added for safety.
Fruit Purees	Good flowing and uniform consistency; not thickened like a butter and not too thin. No evidence of scorching (black flecks, unusual darkening, and bad odor if opened). Only hot pack is recommended. Fig and tomato purees should not be canned by fruit juice canning methods.
Grapefruit and Orange Sections	Firm sections with most of white tissue removed. Sections may be packed in citrus juice as well as syrup or water. Citrus juice will yield a cloudier liquid. The flavor of orange sections is best if the sections are canned with equal parts of grapefruit. Grapefruit may be canned without oranges.
Grapes	Pack should be full with good solids to liquid ratio. Liquid should be bright and clear. Fruit is tight skinned. No floating of fruit above liquid. No stem end discoloration.
Peaches or Nectarines	Canned as halves or slices. Peaches are peeled; nectarines are not. Pits of both are removed. Fruit should be firm without signs of mushiness or over ripeness. No discoloration on cut edges. Color should be even and characteristic of cooked ripe fruit. No floating of fruit above liquid. Raw packs trap an excessive amount of air, fruit floats, and browning is common over time from both these problems.
Pears	Canned peeled and without cores. May be halves or quarters. Fruit white and firm, but tender with cooked appearance. No signs of mushiness. Liquid is clear and free of sediment. No floating fruit. Only hot pack is recommended.
Plums	Fruit is not usually peeled. Canned whole or halved. Fruit skin on whole plums has been pricked on two sides to avoid uneven splitting. Freestone varieties may be halved; pits should be removed when plums are halved. No floating fruit. No cloudiness in liquid or sediment.
Rhubarb	Brightly colored. Even consistency. Only hot pack is recommended (stewed rhubarb). No leaves. No signs of scorching (burning) during preparation.

Judging Canned Tomatoes and Tomato Products

Headspace allowances for tomato products vary. Headspace for canned tomatoes, tomato juice and chile salsa is $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. For tomato sauce and paste, headspace is $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Headspace for ketchups is $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.

Canned tomatoes and tomato products should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness.

Desirable General Characteristics for Tomatoes and Tomato Products

Size and Shape	Uniform pieces of same to similar size and shape.
Pack - Tomatoes	Attractive; neat; space well used. Good proportion of solids to liquid. Liquid covers all product with $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace. No floating pieces. No skins. No sprouting seeds (a sign of over-mature tomatoes). Raw pack tomatoes without added liquid should be packed so that enough juice is extracted from the fruit to produce adequate covering liquid. This pack will not have tomatoes or pieces that retain uniform shapes; the tomatoes are squeezed as they are pushed into the jar to fill all the spaces and create juice.
Pack – Juices and Sauces	No seeds, peel or other foreign particles. No wasted space in jar.
Texture – Tomatoes	Firm but ripened fruit used. Free from cores and green spots. If whole or halved hot packs, pieces retain shapes yet jars are filled as completely as possible with pieces.
Color	Uniform bright color characteristic of variety throughout the pack. Free from brown or black spots, signs of mold, or discoloration. Color of tomato-vegetable juice blends may be lighter (less red) than pure tomato juice.
Liquid – Tomatoes	Clear, bright if water; however, some tissue from the tomatoes will break off and be in the liquid. May be slightly tinted from color of tomatoes. Alternatively, strained tomato juice may be used as the covering liquid. Any liquid completely covers solids. No sediment, cloudiness, or bubbles. No foreign matter.
Container	Properly labeled. Appropriate size for available recommended canning processes. Clean, clear standard canning jar. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.
Acidification	To ensure safe acidity in whole, crushed, or juiced tomatoes, the following should have been added: 2 tablespoons of bottled lemon juice or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of citric acid per quart of tomatoes. (Use one

tablespoon bottled lemon juice or 1/4 teaspoon citric acid per pint jar.)
Vinegar is a less desirable choice because of undesirable flavor changes, but can be used: 4 tablespoons of a 5 percent acidity bottled vinegar per quart jar of tomatoes.

Judging Criteria for Additional Tomato Products

Standard Tomato Sauce	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. Can vary in thickness, but should be thicker than drinking juice and more fluid than paste.</p> <p>No pieces of tomato, seeds, skin, cores or stems. If juice is blended instead of being pressed or strained, discoloration from trapped air may have occurred during cooking and canning.</p>
Spaghetti Sauce	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended.</p> <p>Consistency should be that of ready-to-serve thickness and uniform throughout jar.</p> <p>Pleasant, even color throughout jar.</p> <p>Added pieces of vegetables or meat should be uniform in size and of appropriate bite-size.</p> <p>No skins, cores or stems of tomatoes.</p> <p>No black flecks from burning (scorching).</p> <p>Spaghetti sauce with vegetables, unlike plain standard tomato sauce, requires pressure processing.</p> <p>Spaghetti sauce with meat requires pressure processing.</p>
Tomato Salsas	<p>Salsas are mixtures of acid and low-acid ingredients.</p> <p>The actual recipe will determine whether boiling water or pressure canning is appropriate. Salsa should have ingredients evenly distributed throughout jar. Pieces of vegetables should be uniform in size and of appropriate bite-size.</p> <p>No skins, cores or stems of tomatoes. Attractive coloring.</p>
Tomatoes with Okra or Zucchini	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. Products must be pressure canned. No stems of any vegetable. No skins or cores of tomatoes.</p> <p>Zucchini should be sliced or cubed; skin may be left on.</p> <p>Okra should be cut into uniform, easily eaten size pieces. Small pods may be left whole.</p>
Catsups and Chili Sauces	<p>No separation. Tomatoes should be heated immediately after peeling and cutting. Tomatoes should be cooked down, not blended, as this will incorporate air. Attractive, appetizing color.</p> <p>Thick, but movable consistency, uniform throughout jar.</p> <p>No peels, cores or stems.</p>

Judging Canned Vegetables

Headspace for most vegetables should be 1 inch. For shelled fresh lima beans, the headspace is greater for quart jars. For small beans, it is 1½ inches for quart jars; for large beans, it is 1¼ inches for quarts.

Canned vegetables should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness. Although the variety of vegetables that are canned include many textures, degrees of starchiness, shapes and colors, there is general information that can be applied to each. Specific considerations for certain types of vegetables are needed and presented in the following pages.

Desirable General Characteristics for Vegetables

Size and Shape	Uniform pieces of same to similar size and shape; clean-cut edges. For many vegetable packs, pieces should be appropriate size to serve.
Pack	Attractive; neat; space well used. Good proportion of solids to liquids. Liquid covers all product with appropriate headspace left empty. No floating of pieces. Fancy packs are generally discouraged. Vertical or horizontal layering can not only be impractical, but can interfere with intended heat penetration during the canning process. (i.e., the product may be under processed.)
Texture	Pieces of vegetables should hold their shape. No appearance of overcooking. Free of mushiness. Excess starchiness (peas, potatoes) can indicate vegetables chosen were too mature. Free from stringy or fibrous appearance (potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, winter squash, pumpkin)
Color	Natural coloring; no artificial coloring; uniform. Free from bruises, brown spots, other blemishes and signs of insect damage.
Liquid	Clear, bright. Suitable consistency of liquid for product. No sediment, cloudiness, or bubbles. No foreign matter such as stems, leaves, strings, husks.
Container	Properly labeled. Appropriate size for available recommended canning processes*. Clean, clear standard canning jar. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

*Check recommended processes. Cream-style corn, mushrooms and peppers should be canned in jars no larger than pints.

Common Problems Probable Causes

Cloudy liquid	Starch from over-ripe vegetables; sign of spoilage; hard water. May indicate spoilage is taking place.
Vegetable pieces soft and mushy	May result from minerals in hard water. Over-mature product. Overcooking.
Darkened vegetable	Surface darkening from air in headspace when vegetable is not completely covered by liquid. Too much air left in headspace from under processing or no processing. Too much air trapped in pack from use of raw pack. Over processing can cause darkening throughout the jar. Sugars in sweet corn can caramelize (brown) from the heat of processing. Some varieties should not be used for canning; severely discolored corn should not be entered in competition.
Floating of vegetable	Pieces were packed too loosely. Raw pack was used and air in the vegetable tissue itself could not all be exhausted during processing.
Jar underfilled	Raw pack was used; vegetable shrunk during processing. Jar was not packed with proper attention to detail.
Sediment in bottom of jar	Over-mature vegetable. Hard water.

Judging Criteria for Individual Vegetables

Asparagus	Uniform size and length of stalks (4 to 6 inches) or pieces (usually 1 inch). Tender, tight-tipped spears. Color should be bright. Tough scales should be removed. Free from woody and stringy stalks. Pieces or stalks should not have mushy texture.
Beans, Butter and Lima	Beans should be green, young and tender. Even in size and color. Free from immature beans, beans changing from green to light green or white, and starchy tough beans. Beans should not be over packed and mashed down. Liquid should not be too cloudy from excess starchiness. Headspace for pint jars is 1 inch. Headspace for small beans in quart jars is 1¼ inches; for large beans in quart jars it is 1½ inches.
Beans, Green and Waxed	Fresh color, typical of variety; uniform in size, length, and color. One-inch length of pieces preferred, but beans may be left whole. Filled but tender pods (seeds should not be prominent in

pods. Few if any free seeds that have fallen out of broken-apart pods). Variety may be flat- or round-podded but both should not be included in one jar. Free from browning of cut edges or seeds. Free of rusting or other blemishes and stems.

Beets

Must be canned peeled. Beets less than 2 inches in diameter may be canned whole; larger beets should be sliced or cubed. Uniform size and shape. Color should be dark, deep, and even. Brownish-red or faded color or white rings are undesirable. Liquid should be sparkling clear, red color with no cloudiness or sediment. Free from stems and roots or any traces of skin. Free from fibrous appearance (beets over 3 inches in diameter are often fibrous).

Carrots

May be canned whole if small; otherwise slice or dice. Must be peeled or scraped; smooth surface preferred. Diameter of slices less than 1¼ inches desired. Size and shape should be uniform throughout jar. Color may be vary pale to deep orange, depending on variety, but should be uniform. Free from root hairs, traces of peel and stems. Free from fibrous or wide, woody-looking carrot slices. Liquid should be clear, free of sediment and only contain a tint of color from the carrot.

Corn, Cream Style

Can in pints only. Only hot pack canning is recommended. Kernels should be slightly immature, cut from cob at about center of kernel. The rest of the texture comes from scraping the cob. Color should be bright yellow and even throughout jar. Consistency should be thick and creamy, but not stiff or gelled from excessive starchiness. Free from signs of burning (scorching) while being cooked.

Corn, Whole Kernel

Slightly immature kernels should have been chosen. Kernels should be cut to about ¾ depth of kernel and retain distinct shape. Color should be bright. Jars should contain a single variety. Good proportion of corn and liquid, with liquid completely covering solids. Liquid may be slightly cloudy from starch, but there should be no excess starch or sediment. Free from silk and pieces of cob. Canning of some sweeter varieties or too immature kernels may cause browning. Exhibitor should not enter jars of varieties that brown or discolor too much when canned.

Greens – Spinach, Mustard, Turnip, etc.

Only hot pack canning is recommended. Leaves should be tender, free of tough stems and large midribs. Free from signs of insect damage, discoloration. Greens should be packed loosely in jar and have a uniform green color. Liquid should be light green and clear, free from cloudiness or sediment.

Okra

Only hot pack canning is recommended. Pods should be young and tender. Free of diseased and rust-spotted pods. Small pods

	<p>may be left whole; larger ones should be sliced into 1-inch pieces. Color depends on variety. Liquid clear and free of starchy sediment.</p>
Peas – Blackeye, Crowder or Field	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. Young and tender peas of uniform size and roundness. Color should be bright and characteristic of product, uniform throughout jar. Peas should be adequately hydrated. Free from split, broken or mushy peas. Liquid fairly clear, only a slight starchy appearance is allowable. No excess starch or starchy sediment. Only one variety should be in a jar.</p>
Peas, Green or English	<p>Young and tender peas of uniform size and roundness; slightly immature peas may be used. Color should be bright and evenly green with no yellow or white peas. Free from split, broken or mushy peas. Liquid fairly clear, only a slight starchy appearance is allowable. Free from excess starch or starchy sediment.</p>
Potatoes, White	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. Potatoes must be peeled. Small potatoes, 1 to 2 inches in diameter, may be packed whole; larger sizes should be cubed. Pieces throughout jar should be of uniform size. Color should be white. Texture should be firm and smooth. Free from mushiness. Any eyes should be shallow and have no color. Liquid should be fairly clear, and in potatoes, a slight starchy appearance is allowable. Free from excess starch or starchy sediment, however.</p> <p>Potatoes should be covered with fresh boiling water when packed. Use of cooking water causes excess starch in the jar and a potentially unsafe product.</p>
Pumpkin and Winter Squash	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. Pieces should be peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes, not mashed or pureed. Color should be uniform yellow to orange color, depending on variety. Free from stringy texture or overly soft pieces. Liquid should be clear and free of starchy sediment. There are no endorsed canning processes for mashed or pureed pumpkin and winter squash.</p>
Soup Mix	<p>Only hot pack canning is recommended. The jar may consist of a mixture of vegetables, adequately hydrated dried beans and peas, meat, poultry, or seafood. Mix should be even throughout jar with consistent sizing of individual ingredients. Color mix should be attractive and colors should be natural and typical of the individual products. Jars should be filled with about half solids and half liquid. Free from cloudiness or starchiness. May not be thickened or contain rice, noodles, cream or milk.</p>

Sweet Potatoes

Only hot pack canning is recommended. Skins of sweet potatoes must be removed. Small potatoes may be canned whole. If larger, potatoes should be cut into pieces, but **never mashed or pureed.**

Pieces should be uniform in size and shape. Color may vary from yellow to orange, depending on variety, but should be uniform. Liquid clear and free of starchy sediment; there may be a tint of color from the potatoes. Pack is free from pieces of skin, root hairs, or dark and discolored spots.

There are no endorsed canning processes for mashed or pureed sweet potatoes.

Judging Jams, Jellies, and Preserves

Headspace for jams, jellies, other sweet preserves and butters should be ¼ inch.

Canned jams, jellies and preserves should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness. The variety of fruits that are made into sweet spreads and preserves include many textures, shapes and colors, but it is still possible to describe desirable characteristics for each class of food.

Jelly is a semi-solid mixture of fruit juice and sugar that is clear and firm enough to hold its shape. Other spreads are made from and include chopped, crushed or ground fruit. Jam also will hold its shape, but it is less firm than jelly. Jam is made from crushed or chopped fruits and sugar. Jams made from a mixture of fruits are usually called conserves, especially when they include citrus fruits, nuts, raisins, or coconut. Marmalades are soft fruit jellies with small pieces of fruit or citrus peel evenly suspended in a transparent jelly. Traditional home canned preserves are made of small, whole fruits or uniform-size pieces of fruits in a clear, very thick to slightly jellied sugar syrup. Fruit butters are made from fruit pulp cooked with sugar until thickened to a spreadable consistency.

Judging Criteria for Jellies

Jars of jelly should be held up to a good light source to check for clarity and color. Any sample taken out of the jar to check tenderness and consistency should not be put back into the jar. The consistency of jelly can be judged without removing from the jar. Turn the jar on its side and give it a single, sharp shake. Then rotate the jar slowly at an angle or on its side. The jelly should pull away from the jar cleanly, without breaking and without leaving any residue on the jar. The shape of the jar should be retained and the entire mass of jelly should be able to be rolled around inside the jar in one mass. If a single, sharp shake does not loosen the jelly, try tapping the bottom edge of the jar against the heel of the hand.

Clarity or Clearness

Clear, usually sparkling, transparent or translucent (depending on fruit juice). Free from sediment, cloudiness, pulp or crystals. Pepper jellies will be a little cloudier or have slight amount of pulp that should be suspended throughout the jar.

Color	Natural coloring.	Close to characteristic color of original juice.
Pack		Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from air bubbles and foam. Consistency Firm enough to hold shape, but tender (quivers). Entire half-pint or pint jar contents should stay together and not break apart. Leaves clean, sharp edge when cut. Not sticky, gummy or syrupy.
Container		Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

Judging Criteria for Jams and Conserves

Jams are made from chopped, crushed or ground fruit. Shape of the fruit pieces is not retained during preparation. Jam is a shapeless mass outside of the jar, with a uniform, soft consistency thick enough to spread. Juices are of a slight jelly-like consistency. Conserves are a combination of fruits, usually citrus fruits and nuts, and sometimes raisins or coconut, with a consistency like jam.

Clarity or Clearness		Even though there is no separated jelled juice, the jam and conserve should be translucent and not “muddy” looking. Free from separation into layers, sediment, cloudiness or crystals.
Color		Natural coloring. Characteristic of the cooked fruit. Free of discoloration, especially from burning or scorching in preparation.
Pack		Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from air bubbles and foam.
Consistency		Smooth, thick, uniform throughout. Easily spreadable; not too stiff. Not runny, gummy or syrupy.
Container		Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.
Flavor/Odor		If jam or conserve is tasted: Characteristic of the natural fruit. Not too sweet or too tart. Not overcooked or burned. The flavor of a conserve should be that of the dominant fruit. No scorched (burned) or musty odors.

Judging Criteria for Preserves and Marmalades

Traditional fruit preserves consist of small, whole fruits or uniformly sized pieces of larger fruits in a very thick sugar syrup or slightly jellied juice. Very thin slices of lemon or lemon juice may have been added. Marmalades consist of pieces of fruit cut in small pieces or slices, and usually include citrus. A mixture of fruits may be used. The pieces of fruit or citrus peel are suspended in a clear, translucent jelly.

Clarity or Clearness	Syrup or jellied juice is clear, and bright in color. Syrup in preserves appears thick to “heavy” like honey and surrounds all fruit. Free from mushy broken-apart fruit tissue, sediment, cloudiness, or crystals.
Color	Natural coloring. Characteristic of the base fruit. Pieces of fruit are translucent to clear.
Pack	Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Good proportion of syrup and solids. Fruit well covered with syrup in preserves. Free from air bubbles and foam.
Texture/Consistency	Fruit pieces are tender and hold their shape. Pieces of fruit are uniform in size.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed. Flavor/Odor If preserves or marmalade are tasted: Natural flavor. Not too sweet or strong flavor from overcooking. No scorched (burned) or musty odors.

Judging Criteria for Fruit Butters

Fruit butters are made from fruit pulp cooked with sugar until thickened to a spreadable consistency. They are smooth with even, fine-grained textures of medium-soft consistency. They are not jelled and are usually less sweet than jams, conserves, marmalades or preserves. When the closed jar is turned on its side, a fruit butter should move very slowly and in a solid mass.

Color	Natural coloring. No darkening or discoloration from burning (scorching) during cooking. Spices such as cinnamon, allspice and cloves may darken the butters.
Pack	Headspace $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No paraffin seals allowed. Free from trapped air or bubbles.

Consistency	Smooth, even grain. Thick enough to mound on spoon. Not runny. No separation of fruit and juice. No pieces of skin, seeds or other foreign matter.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard half-pint or pint canning jars only. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

Judging Pickled and Fermented Foods

Headspace for pickled foods should be ½ inch. All pickled and fermented foods should be in standard home canning jars and processed in a boiling water canner. (A few USDA recipes allow for a 30-minute timed pasteurization process at 180°F.) Canned pickled and fermented foods should meet all of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness.

There are many varieties of pickled and fermented foods. These are usually classified by ingredients and method of preparation.

Fermented dill pickles and sauerkraut go through a curing process for several weeks until they are pickled. The color and flavor of the product changes during curing, and acidity develops. Fresh pack, or quick process, pickles do not go through the process of fermentation. These products may or may not be brined for several hours to overnight. Fresh pack pickles are fruit or vegetables covered with a pickling liquid that is usually vinegar-based. Fruit pickles are made from whole or sliced fruits and the vinegar is usually part of a spicy sugar syrup. Relishes are made from chopped fruits and vegetables cooked in a spicy vinegar solution.

A safety concern arises with pickled or fermented foods if the acidity level is not high enough for them to be treated as acid foods processed at boiling water temperatures. Acid in a truly pickled or fermented food is intended to prevent the growth of *Clostridium botulinum*, the bacteria that causes botulism. It is important to use tested recipes with the proper amount of acidity when making pickled or fermented foods.

Below are some general characteristics to look for in all pickled or fermented foods. For guidelines specific to the type of product, refer to the chart on the following pages.

Desirable General Characteristics for Pickles and Fermented Foods

Size and Shape	Pieces are uniform in size and shape. Pieces in relishes not chopped or ground too fine. No ragged edges.
Pack	Attractive; neat; space well used. Good proportion of solids to liquids. Liquid covers all product with appropriate headspace left empty. No floating of pieces.

Fancy packs are generally discouraged. Vertical or horizontal layering is not only impractical, but can interfere with intended heat penetration during the canning process (i.e., the product may be under processed).

Texture	Pieces appear plump, not shriveled or shrunken. Firm for pickles and sauerkraut, softer for some relishes and chutneys. See individual product characteristics. A visual indication for texture is that 1/16th inch slice has been removed from the blossom end of cucumbers.
Color	Even color, characteristic of fresh product, and even throughout the jar. No artificial coloring except for a few specialty cucumber or apple ring pickles.
Liquid	Clear. May have color from some spices. Free of sediment or cloudiness. No foreign matter such as stems, leaves, strings, husks.
Container	Properly labeled. Appropriate size for available recommended canning processes*. Clean, clear standard canning jar. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

*Check recommended processes. Some pickled foods and relishes are to be canned in jars no larger than pints.

Judging Criteria for Individual Pickled or Fermented Products

Cucumber and Mixed Pickles	Pieces are firm and plump. Cucumber skin dark green color. All pieces transparent or semitransparent, completely and evenly saturated with brine. Uniform in size. Small to medium size cucumbers can be used whole; large ones sliced into uniform size slices, strips or chunks. Cucumber not too old and seedy. No oil is to be used. Free of defective spots on peel.
Dill Pickles	Pieces are firm, crisp, and plump. Small to medium size cucumbers can be used whole; larger ones halved or quartered. Dill weed and spices visible. Cloves of garlic should be bright and not discolored. Fermented dills might have slightly cloudy liquid with a tiny bit of sediment on bottom. Slice (1/16th inch) should be removed from blossom end of cucumbers.
Sweet Cucumber Pickles	Pieces are firm, yet tender, plump and well saturated with the syrup. Neatly cut edges that hold their shape. Small cucumbers (gherkins) may be left whole. Other sweet pickles may be

	slices, spears or chunks. Liquid may be thin to a thick syrup. Any visible spices in pleasant proportion.
Other Pickles (Not Cucumber)	Vegetables are bright with color characteristic of the product. Pieces are uniform in size. Pieces not torn, broken, or with ragged edges. All pieces are saturated with the brine. Differently shaped garnishes (onion ring, red pepper strip, etc.) may be used. Any visible spices in pleasant proportion.
Relishes	Small pieces of vegetable or fruit, but large enough to be recognizable. Pieces are uniform in size and shape, cut or chopped neatly. Appear tender but not mushy. Food is semi-transparent in appearance, thoroughly saturated with pickling solution. Clear and bright in color. Visible spices not overwhelming.
Fruit Pickles (Spiced Fruits)	Small fruits may be pickled whole; larger ones are cut into uniformly sized pieces with sharp edges. Fruit is translucent or whole fruit (such as peaches) looks cooked with good penetration of syrup. Texture is firm. Color is uniform, bright, and glossy. Syrup is thinner than in preserves but not watery.
Chow-Chow	This mixture of finely chopped vegetables usually has cabbage as one ingredient. Criteria are similar to those of relish. Color is often bright, yellowish green due to cabbage.
Chutney	Chutneys are chopped fruit pieces or fruit pulp mixed with raisins and chopped vegetables, such as onions and peppers. Chutneys are cooked with sugar and vinegar until thickened. Texture of vegetable pieces is similar to that of relish, but the liquid is thicker. Color is often dark but depends on ingredients and spices used. Free from any signs of scorching (burned flecks).
Sauerkraut	Color is off-white to light straw. Pieces should be translucent, clear and bright. Free from pink, brown, or other discoloration. Shredded pieces should be uniform in thickness. Texture should be firm, not mushy. Clear liquid sufficient to cover all solids. No air bubbles or trapped air.

Judging Specialty Foods

Many fairs or competitions have categories for sauces and specialty-type products such as flavored vinegars. It is difficult to group general characteristics for foods other than those described previously in this publication. Information is provided below for chili or chili con carne, barbecue sauces and flavored vinegars due to their popularity in fairs. For other

miscellaneous canned foods, judges will need to consult the USDA *Complete Guide to Home Canning* or their state Extension publications.

An experienced and trained judge, familiar with preserved foods, should be able to exercise adequate judgment. At the least, many of the general characteristics for container, pack, appearance of contents and attractiveness discussed previously under “Basics of Acceptable Entries” should apply.

Judging Criteria for Barbecue Sauces

Pack	No trapped air or bubbles. No seeds, peel, stems, cores or other foreign matter. No dark flecks as from scorching.
Texture/Consistency	Smooth. Flows but not watery. May round up at edges like a fruit butter. No separation into layers. No layer of fat.
Color	Bright, attractive coloring; no artificial coloring; uniform. No darkening at surface.
Container	Properly labeled. Clean, clear standard canning jar. No cracks, chips, or rust on jar. Recommended lid with good vacuum seal. Band free of rust and dents or other damage; clean and easily removed.

Summary

Competitive events lend excitement to community activities and provide opportunities to educate people about standards of safety and quality in home food preservation.

Judging is a way to recognize quality work on the part of those who enter exhibits and requires application of basic rules and standards from the sponsor, as well as established standards of quality based on the science of food preservation.

Exhibitors should not have to gamble on meeting someone's personal preferences.

Applying uniform standards is the only way to defend placing decisions and avoid the pitfalls of personal bias.

The guidance provided in this manual is intended to help sponsors develop standards for competitions and select qualified judges. The information can also be used to educate and prepare judges, as well as assist them with summaries of key points during the judging experience. The described criteria are based on canning procedures in the USDA *Complete Guide to Home Canning* as well as food drying recommendations from recognized resources in the Cooperative Extension System.