impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Preserve@Home increases safe home food preservation knowledge and behavior

AT A GLANCE

Preserve@Home participants reported an increase in planned behavior change indicating that they were less likely to engage in high-risk food preservation practices.

The Situation

The growing popularity of vegetable gardening and buying locally grown produce has sparked an increase in home food preservation, such as canning, freezing and drying. A 2024 abstract, published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, shared findings indicating the food preservation is widely practiced across the United States with 50.2% using at least one of 16 different preservation methods in 2023 including canning, dehydrating, fermenting and vacuum sealing. Many respondents used methods considered unsafe by USDA standards (11.5%) or limited research-tested recipes (38.7%).

Our Response

Extension faculty from two states (Idaho and Wyoming) provide Preserve@Home, an online home food safety and preservation class taught twice a year through https://campus.extension.org. The class is divided into six main lessons and seven supplemental lessons. Each of the main lessons includes online text (that can be downloaded and printed), weekly online discussion boards to facilitate student interaction, a real-time online video chat with classmates and instructors, open book lesson quizzes and a final test to assess knowledge.

Participants learned food safety and home food preservation, such as canning, freezing and drying.

Program Outcomes

In 2025, Preserve@Home had 50 participants take part in the class. The participants have not only been from Idaho, but also from across the United States. Thirty-one (94%) of the 33 participants who completed the class passed it with 70% or higher.

A retrospective pre/post survey was completed by 20 participants. The reasons that participants reported for taking Preserve@Home include 80% to be in control of what's in their food, 75% to save money, 85% to be more self-sufficient and 95% to better use the produce they grow. Additional results are in Table 1.

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Table 1. Additional pre/post survey results.

Skills/behaviors	Learned	Done before class	Plan to do in future
Used research-based recipes and recommendations when canning foods.	70%	63%	95%
Adjusted processing time for altitude when using a boiling water canner.	55%	53%	100%
Adjusted for altitude when pressure canning by increasing the pressure as recommended.	65%	74%	100%
Added acid when canning tomatoes and tomato products.	65%	63%	100%
Vented pressure canner before processing.	70%	63%	100%
Followed the pressure canner cool down procedure.	65%	58%	100%
Processed all high acid foods in a boiling water canner according to recommendations.	70%	68%	100%
Processed all low acid foods in a pressure canner according to recommendations.	70%	68	100%
Followed a tested research-based salsa recipe and processed according to recommendations.	75%	100%	95%

After taking Preserve@Home a vast majority of those who responded to the survey indicated their intention to follow safe home food preservation practices which will reduce their risk of getting foodborne illness from improperly preserved food. According to the yearly CDC National Botulism Surveillance Summary, from 2017-2021, there were 19 reported cases of foodborne botulism from home canned foods. This averages out to be approximately four cases of foodborne botulism cases a year. The estimated cost of treating botulism is between $100,000-500,000 per case depending on severity. This does not take into account the other potential foodborne illnesses that can be contracted from eating improperly preserved food. Therefore, Preserve@Home could not only potentially save human life but also significantly reduce healthcare costs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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