

Canning Smoked Fish in Cans

Have clean and ready:

Pressure canner: Read manufacturer's instructions and have your pressure canner dial gauge tested for accuracy each year at your local Cooperative Extension Service office.

Can sealer: Read instructions about assembling and adjusting the sealer. Assemble the can sealer, then test its use with empty can and lid. Closely inspect each can seam as it is removed from the can sealer. Adjust can sealer immediately if seam is defective.

Cans and lids: Tall 1-pound (size: 301 x 408) or flat ½-pound (size: 307 x 200.25) cans are also called Alaska salmon cans. Two types of cans are available: tapered with no side or bottom seams (also called two-piece cans) and three-piece cans with a side and bottom seams.

Smoked fish: Slightly less than 1 pound of smoked fish will fill a tall 1-pound (301 x 408) can and slightly less than ½ pound of smoked fish will fill a flat ½-pound (307 x 200.25) can.

Brine: Use your favorite brine recipe or one of those suggested in the related publications listed at the end of this publication. If sugar is used in the brine, remember that the long canning times may cause sugar to caramelize or leave a burned flavor in the final product. You may need to experiment with the amount of sugar in brine recipes. The brine and smoked flavors will become stronger after the fish is canned.

Sharp knife

Cutting board or cardboard or newspapers

Stove or any heat source that gives reliable, steady heat

Dry potholders

Towel or paper towels

Meat thermometer or any thermometer that registers 170°F

Permanent marker

Clock and/or timer

1. **Prepare smoked fish.** Use only fresh, firm fish since smoking and canning won't improve the quality. Frozen smoked fish may be canned. Thaw smoked fish in the refrigerator or wrapped tightly under cold water.
2. **Cut the smoked fish in can-sized lengths.** When cutting fish to fit cans, allow ¼ inch of empty space at top of can. This is called headspace.
3. **Fill can, packing solidly.** Leave ¼ inch headspace at the top of the can.
4. **Critical Point: Exhaust open cans to 170°F.** Cans must be exhausted so a vacuum will form after the can is sealed and processed. This is done by heating the fish in open cans to 170°F. Water in the pressure canner or other large pot should come halfway up the sides of the bottom row of cans. Turn heat on high and bring water to a boil. Place the open, filled cans in the pressure canner on a rack. **DO NOT** cover the canner with a lid unless each can is covered with aluminum foil. Adjust heat to keep water boiling. Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of the fish in the cans. A second layer of cans may be exhausted in the pressure canner or in cake or roasting pans set on top of the stove (set open cans in water in the pan).
5. **When the temperature of the fish reaches 170°F, seal one can at a time.** Use a jar lifter or hot pad to handle the hot, filled can. With a clean cloth or paper towels, wipe the edge of each can carefully.
6. **Seal can using adjusted can sealer.** Set the hot, exhausted can on the can sealer turntable and place the lid on the can. Seal cans according to the instructions that come with your sealer. Check each can seam before you put the can in the pressure canner. If a seam looks bad, adjust your can sealer immediately. The fish must be removed from the can and placed in a new can, heated to 170°F and resealed. Check can seams often and adjust sealer as needed.
7. **Fill the canner by placing the sealed cans on the rack in the canner.** If you have a second layer, use a second rack or

stagger the cans. Add more water to pressure canner if needed (to equal 3 quarts). Put canner lid on and lock in position. When closed, most pressure canner lid handles must be centered over canner body handles. Turn heat on high. When a steady steam starts coming out of the vent, let it escape for 10 minutes. This is called exhausting or venting.

8. **Close vent with weight or petcock.**
9. **Heat canner until the needle on the dial gauge reaches 11 pounds or until the 10-pound weighted gauge rocks or jiggles according to manufacturer's instructions.** Adjust heat to keep pressure steady. Set timer and write down the time when proper pressure is reached. Figure out the time the canning will be finished and write that time down, too.

10. Hold the pressure steady:

Dial gauge canner, process at 11 pounds pressure at altitudes of 0-2,000 feet

| Can Size | Processing Time |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1-pound cans (size: 301×408) | 125 minutes |
| ½-pound cans (size: 307×200.25) | 110 minutes |

(At altitudes of 2,001-4,000 feet, use 12 pounds pressure; at 4,001-6,000 feet, use 13 pounds pressure; and at 6,001-8,000 feet, use 14 pounds pressure.)

Weighted gauge canner, process with 10 pound weight at altitudes of 0-1,000 feet

| Can Size | Processing Time |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1-pound cans (size: 301×408) | 125 minutes |
| ½-pound cans (size: 307×200.25) | 110 minutes |

(At altitudes above 1,000 feet, use 15-pound weight.)

Watch canner and check the pressure often. If pressure drops below recommended number of pounds, increase heat to bring pressure back up and start processing time from the beginning (0 minutes).

11. **At the end of the processing time, turn off the heat.**
12. **Move canner off the heat, if possible.** On a dial gauge canner wait for the overpressure plug to drop, the cover lock to drop and the gauge needle to rest on 0. Tip the pressure regulator; if no steam escapes, the

pressure regulator and lid may be safely removed. On weighted gauge canners (ones with no dial gauge), wait for the overpressure plug to drop and the cover lock to drop. Test to see if pressure is down by gently nudging the weight. No steam should be released and no resistance should be felt. Remove the pressure regulator and the lid. **DO NOT** release steam by tipping the weight or running the canner under cold water. (It takes 25 to 35 minutes for pressure to drop in a small canner filled with cans and 45 to 60 minutes in a large canner with a full load.)

13. **Loosen the lid.** Tilt the back edge up first to keep the escaping steam away from your face.
14. **Remove cans from canner with a jar lifter or hot pad.** Put cans on newspapers, cooling racks or towels. Allow to cool completely for 12 hours. **DO NOT** put cans in cold water. Can lids will pull in as contents cool and a vacuum is formed.
15. **Check can seams.** The seam should be flat and smooth with no pointed or rough edges. No leakage should be seen around the can edges.
16. **Wipe cans if they are greasy.** Use a permanent marker to label cans with the type of smoked fish, date, processing time and pounds pressure. Store in a cool, dry place. Do not allow cans to freeze.
17. **Clean and dry your canner.** Wrap in paper and store. **DO NOT** fasten lid on, but wrap it in paper and place it upside down on the canner to protect the gauge, vent and sealing ring.

UAF Cooperative Extension Service Publications

- FNH-00022 *Assembling a Can Sealer*
- FNH-00023 *Visual Inspection of Can Seams in Home Food Preservation*
- FNH-00125 *Canning Fish in Cans*
- FNH-00126 *Canning Fish in Quart Jars*
- FNH-00128 *Canning the Fish Catch*
- FNH-00222 *Home Freezing of Fish*
- FNH-00223 *Home Canning Smoked Fish and Home Smoking Fish for Canning*
- FNH-00227 *Canning Meat in Cans*
- FNH-00325 *Smoking Fish at Home*
- FNH-01281 *Canning Meat and Fish in Jars (YouTube)*
- FNH-01282 *Canning Meat and Fish in Cans (YouTube)*

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08-05/KL/11-24

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Reviewed October 2024