



Live Farm Fresh, Without the Farm

Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 23 Q&A Episode - Weck Jars - Demystified

Show Notes: www.LivingHomegrown.com/23

This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode #23.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh, without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey there everyone and welcome to the Living Homegrown podcast. I'm your host Theresa Loe. And this is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm. And that's through artisan food crafts, like canning, preserving and fermenting, small space food growing, backyard critter keeping — everything from chickens to goats — and just living a more sustainable lifestyle.

If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics or my online canning courses, just visit my website LivingHomegrown.com.

Today's episode is a Q&A episode. I am going to answer a listener question. If you don't already know it, on my website I have a section for asking questions and I can't answer everybody individually, like I can't email everybody their own personal answer. If I did, it would be my entire business would just be sitting there answering questions because I get a ton. But what I can do is use those questions to guide what I cover on my podcast, on my blog, and even our our television show Growing a Greener World. So I welcome all the questions. It really helps me know all the things you guys are interested in and what you need help with.



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And today's question comes from Cynthia. She actually left me a voice message. You can do that on my website or you can send me an email question. And she sent me a voice message so what I'm going to do is play the question and then give you the answer.

Cynthia: Hey Theresa. I really enjoy your podcast. I want to ask you what Weck Jars are. And whether they can be used the same way that my mason jars are used in canning. Thank you very much!

Theresa: Okay, Cynthia, let me see if I can answer your question. But first of all I have to say that was so cute whoever was in the background saying hi! [laughs] That was really darling! Tell him I say hi back!

Let me answer your question so for any of you who have not heard of Weck jars before it's a brand it's a manufacturer name and I'm going to go into exactly what Weck jars are and how they work. Because they are very, very different from the type of jars we're used to.

And before I get into that first I want to really, really explain... Weck jars are not USDA approved for canning here in the United States. And let me explain what that means because it's not as scary as that sounds. There are currently no USDA approved methods or procedures for using these jars because there has never been a study funded and performed in order to present the proper guidelines. So this is very different than something being called out by the USDA as dangerous. It is not that. They have not been studied, properly studied and there are no USDA guidelines at this time.

However, these jars are extremely popular in Europe. And they are the equivalent of what our Ball or Kerr jars are and they have been used for years and years and years. They have a long history. But they are not USDA approved. And that's really important because it means if you decide you want to use Weck jars, it's up to you to follow proper procedures and make sure you're educated on how they work. And this is because you're not following the USDA guidelines called out in most canning books.



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Now when I went through Master Food Preserver training many years ago, we were not allowed, and Master Food Preservers are still not allowed today to teach you how to use these jars because they are not USDA approved. So the first question people usually want to know from me is if they are not USDA approved do I personally use them myself?

And the answer is yes! I do use them in a limited way. And that's because I love the look and the feel of Weck jars and I'll go into that in a few minutes. However I use them on a limited basis mostly because of the cost. They are more expensive than our standard canning jars that we're used to using here in the United States. I personally use them mostly for water-bath canned products like jams and pickles. And that's because really these are items that I make the most and I keep them in the jar after opening them and I keep them in the refrigerator so I love to use these Weck jars because I love the look of the jar so much and I want to enjoy them after I've opened the jar.

However Weck jars can be used for pressure canning as well and I'll go into all of how they're used in a few minutes but the first thing you need to understand is when you use Weck jars you're kind of using them at your own risk in that they're not USDA approved, officially approved like all our other canning jars. And most of what I teach are only USDA approved methods and recipes.

And so when I start talking about Weck jars I just want to make it really clear that these are not on the same spectrum because they have not been USDA approved. However I do use them myself, I do find them myself, but you have to make your own choice and use them at our own discretion.

So that being said, let me explain what Weck jars are. They are made in Germany and consist of basically four parts. The glass container or the jar, which are similar to our jars except that they come in really unusual shapes and sizes. And they have really beautiful shapes to them. You'll see if you google Weck jars. And they have a glass lid, where we have a



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metal lid. And they have a rubber gasket. And that rubber gasket kind of has the same purpose as the rubber gasket that is inside the ball canning jar lid. It is what will help you create the seal. So you have the container or the jar, you have this glass lid, and then the rubber gasket. And then the fourth part are these stainless steel clips and these clips snap down onto the lid and they hold the lid in place during the processing. Okay? So you have those four parts. The jar, the lid, the gasket and the clips.

Now you're probably wondering how exactly this works. Well first let me say that they work in basically the same way as our regular standard jars do here. In that they can be used in water bath and pressure canning and they create a pressure seal just like our jars do. But where they're different is that you have these different parts that go together to create that seal. But they're used in the same way. You put the same types of recipes in there, you process them for the same amount of time as you would a regular canning jar. Okay?

So let me just give you a little bit of an overview of how these jars works so that you understand the process. Now I'm not going to go into all the detailed specifics and the tricks for how you get a really good seal just right now here on the podcast because it's not something is really easily explained auditorially. You sort of need to see photos or even a video to understand how it works. And I would probably lose you in translation somewhere along the way. But I want you to understand how these jars are different from the way we use our standard Ball or Kerr jars here in the United States. And it's important that you understand how they work. So let me just explain the process.

First of all, you heat the jars and the lids just like you would with regular canning jars. You heat them in hot water and you heat the glass lid in hot water. And then you soak the rubber rings in hot water as well to soften them. After you've filled the jars and you wipe down the lids just like you normally would you add the rubber ring to each of the glass lids and you set that lid and rubber ring onto the filled jar. And then what's really different is that you use these metal stainless steel clips to hold those lids in place. And those clips hold the lid through the whole canning process



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either in the water bath canner or in your pressure canner. And that's really where it's different. And it takes a little time to get used to using those metal clips. They snap down really hard and you feel like you're going to break the jar and that's where it's really different from how we use a screw top ring to hold our lids in place.

So after you fill these Weck jars and you have the clips in place you process them just as you would a standard jar, in either a water bath or a pressure canner. And when you take them out you let them sit and cool just like you would any other jar. However, once they're cool it's really important that you remove those clips. Those clips are only there to hold the lid in place while it's processing. And this is actually the same thing that we do here with our regular jars here in the United States when we let our jars cool and we take off the ring that is holding it in place. You are not supposed to store your jars with that ring in place and if you're not sure why I have a whole post on why and I'll link to that in the show notes. But the way we take the rings off the canning jars for storage, in the Weck jar you take those clips off for the exactly the same reasons. It allows you to see if you get a broken seal.

So one of the questions I get from people when they use or are interested in using Weck jars is once you've done all of this how do you know if you have a good seal? In a regular canning jar you have the ability to press down in the centre and the lid will either pop back and forth if it's unsealed or it won't move and that's how you know that you have a good seal because the lid doesn't move.

But when you have a glass lid, how do you know that it's sealed? Well it's actually really easy. There's a little tab or a tongue on the rubber ring that sticks out from the jar. When it's all finished being processed that little tab points downward. So when your jars are sitting on the shelf you see that all the tabs are pointing down and that shows you that it's completely sealed.

If you're not sure, another way to test the seal is to pick the jar up by the lid after you have removed the clips. And you wouldn't do this until it's completely cooled because when it's still warm it's still creating that



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vacuum seal. But when it's all cooled off and you're ready to put it into the pantry you can pick it up by the lid and if it's sealed the lid will not come off. However, that tag works like a charm and it's easy to visually see that that Weck jar is sealed.

And as a side note let me just tell you a really handy hint or a tip about Weck jars. A lot of time people will use a Weck jar and when it comes time to open a Weck jar they try to pry it open with their fingernails or a knife. you don't have to do that! In fact doing that is not a good idea because you can wind up chipping or breaking your jar or you spill your contents all over the place when it finally lets loose and pops open. The way to properly open up a Weck jar is to grab that little tab or that tongue on the rubber ring and pull it. When you do it breaks the seal and it'll make little "swwwwit" sound and the lid just comes right off. It's so easy!

So if you ever do use one of these jars, just know that's the trick for opening it. The tab tells you that it's sealed and pulling the tab opens it up.

So now that you understand kind of what a Weck jar is and how it's used let me explain some of the reasons why people love these Weck jars. I think the number reason is that they come in beautiful shapes. They are absolutely beautiful jars and they're very unusual.

Also because they are glass and only the glass is in contact with the food, they are BPA and chemical free. And that is one of the reasons that a lot of people become interested in Weck jars is because only glass is in contact with the food. Whereas in our normal regular canning jars we do have a metal jar that has a plastic coating. And although most of those coatings are BPA free these days they do still have chemicals in them. So even being BPA free does not mean chemical free. And a lot of people go to the Weck jars because they want to be completely chemical free while canning.

Another reason why people love Weck jars is that just like our regular jars the glass portions of a Weck jar are reusable. So yes, you use them over and over and over. The only thing that is not reusable is the rubber ring.



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Once you use that rubber ring once, you have to throw it away just like we do on our canning lids. We only use our regular canning lids once, you only use a Weck rubber seal once. Same thing.

Now there are some downsides to a Weck jar and I think really the biggest downside is that they're expensive. They're much more expensive than our standard jars and part of that is because they're imported from Europe. Now they have been around forever and it's only been recently that they have become easy to buy in the United States and perhaps their prices will continue to drop as more people use them. About twenty years ago you had to special order them from Europe and that was actually how I got my very first set of Weck jars is I went in on a set with friends and we ordered them from Europe and it was extremely expensive but I still have and use those canning jars today. As long as you take care of them they do last forever.

Today however it's much easier to buy Weck jars online or even at high end stores like Williams Sonoma. But they're still expensive. They're more expensive than the standard canning jar that we're used to. And where you can go to a garage sale and pick up some used jars from somebody, you don't usually see Weck jars in a garage sale for cheap. They are always more expensive.

Now I personally only have a small supply of these jars and I use them not only for canning but I store all kinds of things in my pantry in these jars just because they're so beautiful. I store my wine salt and my homemade tomato powder in these jars and they look really pretty. Now if you've never heard of wine salt or homemade tomato powder I will have links in the show notes for recipes for how to make them. They're just some recipes that I make every year and I make them as gifts and I'll make sure to link in case you're interested in that. But the point is that I find these jars so pretty that I like to store other things other than jams and jellies in these jars.

Another downside is that unlike the screw top canning jars that we are typically using a Weck jar needs to have those metal clips in order to keep the lid in place if you keep it in the refrigerator. So let's say you open up a



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new jar of jelly or jam. When you put back on the lid it's just sitting on top. It's not really sealed. So you have to use those clips to hold that lid in place.

Now a good alternative to that is to buy the plastic lids that are also made by Weck that kind of snap on top. So you can pop a plastic lid on and put it in your refrigerator. But if the whole reason that you're using Weck jars is because you're trying to avoid plastic then that alternative won't really work for you. And what you have to do is use the metal clips. And I kind of find the metal clips kind of cumbersome to open and close, open and close, particularly if I just want some jelly. So I do tend to use the plastic lids when they're in my refrigerator. But if you're using it to stay away from plastic then that won't work for you.

And then the last reason or the downside of using Weck is that they are not USDA approved yet. There have not been any studies done in order to include them in all the USDA standards and recommendations for canning. As of the recording of this podcast which is September 2015. But they are extremely popular in Europe and have been around for a very long time. And so you just have to decide for yourself if you want to use them or if you even want to spend the money on them since they are more expensive.

So I hope that helped you Cynthia. I think it was a great question! A lot of people hear about Weck jars and they think it's some special magic thing. It's just a brand name. And yes those jars can be used in a very similar way that we use our regular jars for canning. And I hope that helped you!

I'll have links to everything I mentioned in today's episode including some source information for getting Weck jars and all you have to do is go to LivingHomegrown.com/23. That's slash 2-3.

And if any of you have questions you would like me to answer on the podcast or on the blog, or you would just like to tell me some special topic you would like me to cover in the future by all means just let me know. Just go to LivingHomegrown.com/ask and I will do my best to get it in the



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lineup. I sure wish I could just email back individual answers to all the questions I get and I just can't because I don't have enough time but I will use that information to guide what I cover here and on my website and even on our PBS show. So please feel free to let me know what you need help with. Okay? Alright, great!

So thanks so much for listening today. And I want all you guys to keep working on your food choices that are local, seasonal and homegrown. See you next time!

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown podcast. Visit LivingHomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh, without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown podcast.