

# *Canning Jars: The Test of Time*

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*Few may know, but Napoleon played a vital role in the development of canning.*

Throughout the years the canning jar has been used for countless things ranging from food preservation to crafts. Canning jars today go beyond food preservation and can be used for creative décor and gift giving.



## **Napoleonic Beginnings**

Napoleon secured his place in history through more than just his political and military achievements. Few may know, but Napoleon played a vital role in the development of canning. Napoleon is quoted saying, “An army travels on its stomach.” He knew that having brilliant military plans and strategies would not amount to anything if he did not have strong healthy soldiers. Common food preservation practices of the time were drying, pickling and salting. These practices did not have the shelf life that the military needed for their long voyages. Many armies during this time lived on whatever food they could pillage, steal or buy. In 1795, on behalf of the French military, Napoleon offered 12,000 francs to the person that discovered a new way to preserve food.

Nicholas Appert rose to the challenge and conceived the idea of preserving food in glass jars. He experimented with his idea for 15 years. The method he introduced involved heat-processing food in glass jars reinforced with wire and a wax seal. This created an air-tight container and would preserve the food for consumption.

As more of the world was explored and provisions were needed to supply armies, the need for canned foods continued to increase. The glass jars used to preserve the food were easily breakable and an English man by the name of Peter Durand introduced a method of sealing food in tin cans. This allowed soldiers to carry their rations with ease. At this time, the can opener had not been invented and soldiers had to use their bayonets or smash the cans against rocks to open them.

However, records say that Raymond Chevalier-Appert patented the pressure retort (canner) in 1851 to can at temperatures higher than 212 degrees Fahrenheit.

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No one knew the science behind canning until Louis Pasteur discovered the relationship between microorganisms and food spoilage/illness in 1864. Only in 1920, the identity of *Clostridium botulinum* was revealed and its significance to this method of food preservation.

## John Mason

Canned food remained a novelty and was out of reach for farm families and those too poor to buy it. That changed in 1858 when John Mason invented a glass jar that would seal tightly because of a screw-on thread molded into its top. This made the process easier and allowed for reusable parts. Years later Mason added a removable rubber ring to the process that provided an even more effective seal. Mason's jars helped revolutionize food preservation in both America and Europe. John Mason held a patent on his invention.

Despite the growing popularity of canning in urban and rural areas, Mason's invention never made him rich. He died at the age of 70 in New York as a beggar.

## The Race Is On

In 1879 the Mason jar patent expired and the race was on. Many manufacturers began reproducing the jar that had become a household staple. When manufacturing their jars they added their own improvements and variations.

William Charles Ball and his four brothers started the Wood-Jacketed Can Company in 1886 and started buying smaller companies to help mass produce their version of the canning jar.

Several years later, Alexander Kerr created what we know today as the wide-mouth jar. He also introduced the self-sealing canning jar with a rubber gasket attached to the lid. By attaching the rubber gasket to the lid of the jar it streamlined the canning process.

## Mid and Late 1900s

By 1922 people were sharing canning jar recipes and ideas in newspapers, magazines

and books. *Fruit, Garden & Home Magazine*, today known as *Better Home & Gardens*, frequently featured information and recipes for canning.

During World War II, families were encouraged to grow their own food to limit their reliance on limited food rations. The government strongly promoted victory gardens to increase food production during the war. During this time Americans purchased more than 3 million canning jars.

To promote canning practices and prevent food-borne illnesses, in 2000 several universities and institutions created The National Center for Home and Food Preservation. Their website provided up-to-date information for home preservation practices.

## Pinterest Era

Pinterest launched on March 1, 2010 and created a surge of shared do-it-yourself projects. This opened a whole new world for canning jars. Mason jar is a crafting staple that is pinned time and time again. They have created hobbies for sewing, event and home decorating, cooking, painting, gardening and so much more.

## The Test of Time

The canning jar dates back hundreds of years. Over time the canning jar has adapted from its original design, underwent several modifications, has become useful for crafting and is still used for food preservation. Mason, Ball and Kerr are all household names and will continue to be used for years to come.

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