

WASHING JARS FOR THE CO-OP

BY

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A WORD FOR THOSE WHO BRING JARS TO THE CO-OP

THANKS FOR BEING GREEN !

... AND ANOTHER WORD: **NOT ALL JARS ARE USABLE.**

HERE IS A LIST OF WHAT MAKES JARS UNUSABLE:

- **Dirty jar or lid:** This is a matter of sanitation in the storage shed. We do not want to attract mice.
- **The shape (sometimes):** just too hard to wash and/or impractical to use
- **Solidified oil :** It takes longer than it's worth to scrub.
- **Problems with the lid (the most common):** rusty, moldy, dented or oily. (Oil seems to bond chemically with the sealing ring inside the lid, and will eventually seep out and be messy and rancid.)
- **Not dry inside:** This practically guarantees a moldy lid.

What about lids that retain **odors** ? These lids are unusable until they are deodorized. If an odor can be absorbed, it can be released. But that won't happen if the lid stays on the jar. Air circulation and the passage of the time will eventually do it. Warmth speeds it up. I leave lids on a sunny windowsill or a window ledge, or on top of the register in winter; or in a warm, *turned off* oven (higher heat will ruin the sealing ring); or in the dishwasher through several cycles (though this can lead to rust). I have a kitchen drawer just for lids.

Why bother to deodorize lids ? Pickle jars and spaghetti sauce jars with their wide mouths are nice for honey or for storing foods at home if you prefer not to use plastic.

Many years ago when I was a young housewife, I proudly gave my parents a jar of my homemade sauerkraut. When they opened it, the sauerkraut tasted like spearmint.

(Washing Jars for the Co-op, p.2)

JAR AND BOTTLE LABELS

There are at least six kinds of glue that are used to attach labels to glass. Each kind needs to be dealt with differently.

1. *Water soluble glue, the oldest and simplest.* Just soak in a pan of clear cool water till the label floats off. (I wish they were all so easy !)
2. *Newer labels which seem to have their glue incorporated in their backs.* These can be peeled off whole while dry. Slide a sharp paring knife under a corner and see whether it is going to let go.
3. *New strong labels similar to # 2, but needing a good soaking before they peel off whole.*
4. *Labels stuck on tight all over with glue that does not want to give up.* You have better things to do. Recycle these jars.
5. *Co-op Labels:* These peel off most readily while they are new and dry and have not yet been washed. If they do not come off easily, smear them while they are dry with cooking oil (outdated is fine) or waste fat, and let them sit till they slide off easily. It may take a half hour or longer. Use a dry paper towel to wipe off all vestiges of oily glue. The dishwasher will not do this for you.

Rubbing alcohol is another good solvent for these labels. My father used to use after-shave lotion in the way. It's even better. The alcohol works quickly and evaporates quickly, so you don't let it sit, but work with it right now.

[Rubbing alcohol also removes 95 % of *Sharpie Marker*]

6. *Labels held by a vertical strip of very tough glue (e.g. juice and tea bottles):* Some of this glue is hard and not sticky. Some is extremely strong and very sticky. I handle both the same way. I rub the glue with a paste of *Bon Ami* and water, and bracing the bottle on a dishcloth, I scrape the glue off with a strong-bladed paring knife (not serrated). The *Bon Ami* is, of course, an abrasive, but, equally important, it keeps the dislodged glue from sticking to itself and everything else.

When I've scraped off as much as I can, I finish with a metal chore-boy and more *Bon Ami*, then rinse with clear water so I can see whether I got it all.

[I have tried *Citra-Solv* on this kind of glue, and it does dissolve the glue quickly, but the dissolved glue is still very sticky and spreads all over and you have to use lots of paper towel to wipe every bit off because there is no way to wash it off. I doubt that *Goo Gone* or paint thinner would do better.]

(Washing Jars for the Co-op, p.3)

TOOLS

Here is how to make my favorite nylon net jar scrubber. Go to Misty Hollow (downtown Potsdam) and get a yard or so of nylon net (not tulle). Fold lengthwise so it is about 9 inches wide. Pin it in two or three places so it doesn't slip, and cut off a 12 inch length. Using your longest needle with dental floss or dental tape (not regular thread), sew all around the perimeter in big quarter- to half-inch stitches, a half inch in from the edge. When you finish the fourth side, keep going along the first side a few more inches so the stitches will hold. Especially when the new has worn off, you may find this quite versatile.

My extra-long-handled bottle brush is a tool I like to think I invented. When the plastic handle broke off my old bottle brush, I got a ¼ inch wooden dowel, 18" long, and using dental floss wound round and round, tied the end of the dowel all along the length of the brush and what remained of the metal handle. I often use it with my nylon net scrubber for deep, narrow mouthed jars. The dowel is more rigid than most bottle brush "stems".

When I'm washing jars, my best "tools" are my eyes. I can see best what I am doing when the sunlight is streaming in the window above our kitchen sink. Absent such sunlight (not uncommon for us in the North Country) I have a purely utilitarian old fashioned clip-on lamp with a metal reflector, which my husband rigged up, right above the sink.

Chenille pipe cleaners (also from Misty Hollow) can be used to wash small bottles.

The Lee Valley Catalog (at leevalley.com search for *vase brushes*) offers (for about \$ 8) a set of three vase brushes, with a wire handle 13.5 " long and brushes 1/2" , 3/4" and 5/4" in diameter with natural pig bristles and cotton tips. The ends can be bent to reach corners.

WASHING

Dishwashers are wonderful conveniences. They are also totally lacking in human intelligence. A careful human can outperform a Maytag, perhaps not in speed or convenience, but certainly in reliably getting every jar as clean as new.

After jars come out of the dishwasher, each one has to be checked. The same is true for dishes washed by hand. If re-washing is called for, so be it. Jars the dishwasher didn't get the first time around are likely to need hand washing the second time.

(Washing Jars for the Co-op, p.4)

This washing of jars can not be rushed: ***Nothing less than pristine sparkliness is good enough.*** Maybe you do it, maybe your dishwasher does, maybe it's a partnership.

If you are washing jars or bottles by hand, first give your dish drainer a scrubbing with with a soapy vegetable brush, and a good hot spray rinse.

Bottles that are too narrow-mouthed or too small to wash in the dishwasher can be washed by hand, rinsed in slowly running hot water (running slowly to save water and heat) and drained, then dried in a 145° to 160° oven. This is the temperature for pasteurization. (Sterilization requires an autoclave. What we do is ***sanitize***). Most oven controls don't register below 170° or 200°, so you can extrapolate or use an oven thermometer or just turn the dial till the oven indicator light comes on. Then turn the oven off and leave the bottles till they are dry, and cool enough to handle.

There is no reason why you can't do this with any bottles or jars you wash for the Co-op. It works for lids too, but I doubt that it would be safe for vanilla bottle lids, or other plastic lids. High heat will ruin the sealing rings inside metal lids. So gentle heat is best, and turn the oven off after it heats.

Chlorine bleach is a time honored germ killer, but I prefer not to add chlorine fumes to my kitchen or the general atmosphere.

Direct sunlight (not through a window) also kills germs.

If jars need scrubbing, I do that by hand, then either run them through the dishwasher or rinse and go ahead and dry them in the oven.

If I am not sure whether my dishwasher is going to be able to clean a jar, but I know it does not need scrubbing, then I rinse the jar with cold water immediately before starting the machine. This allows it to soak rather than bake while the machine is filling with water.

I have found that if I put short, wide-mouthed jars in the corners of the dishwasher they are more apt to get clean than tall jars would be. The sprayer arm inscribes a circle within the square of the dishwasher, and corners can be if-y.

After a jar and lid have been washed clean, the one most important factor that ensures their safety for holding food is that they be kept **completely dry**. Bacteria and mold need moisture to grow.

Jars drain when they are upside down ("bottoms up"). They dry faster when they are right side up ("opening up")

(Washing Jars for the Co-op, p.5)

Even if you use the drying cycle in your dishwasher , some jars may not be completely dry when you unload the machine. They can be put in your clean dish drainer, or in a new clean paper sack (from the Co-op check out counter) with their lids also in the sack, spaced so the air can reach them until they are dry. Fold the sack shut.

When jars and lids are clean and lids are odor free, and both are completely dry, put the lids on the jars and put them in a new paper sack to keep them clean inside and outside till they are used.

Label the sack with the number and kind(s) of jars or bottles; the word “sanitized”; the date; your name and Co-op member number and your phone number.

Bring your clean jars to the Co-op and go to the person in charge of clean jars, for immediate inspection. The bag does not need to be taped but should be folded securely shut, so it should, of course, not be overloaded.

Know that your work is appreciated, if not by everyone who shops at the Co-op, at least by everyone who has herself or himself earned work credit this way.

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