

GARAGE SALES

Mason Jars: Preserving a Legacy

The pandemic a surge in the popularity of the homesteading lifestyle and farmhouse fashion have brought the clear canning jar, or Mason jar, into the spotlight. Here's more about the classic, collectible jar.

HISTORY

The Mason jar is named for American tinsmith John Landis Mason, who patented the jar in 1858. It has a screw thread on the outer edge of the mouth so that a band can be screwed on, securing a metal lid against the jar's rim. Even though Mason lost his patent, the name Mason jar became synonymous with the canning jar, and Mason can be seen on Ball and Kerr brand jars.

Interest in canning (and Mason jars) has been cyclical ever since, ranging from practical interest on American farms to surges in popularity during World War II and, yes, during the pandemic lockdown.

"You see these moments in American history; whether it's World War II or the counter-culture or the pandemic, can-



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ning always comes back," Paula Johnson, curator of food history at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History said. "(The collection) really does provide a window into home food preservation and the importance of it for so many people."

Some of the most collectible jars include:

THE UPSIDE-DOWN JAR BY BALL

This brand of jar was made for only 10 years and, unlike other jars, is designed to rest on its lid. Collectors have paid

up to \$1,000 for this jar, the Smithsonian said. The first design of this jar was said to be an error, but the company turned it into a coffee dispenser.

THE E-Z SEAL BY ATLAS

This jar was produced in

1910 and the thinking was its distinctive amber hue prevented food spoilage. This isn't true, but what is known is that it's worth upwards of \$60 per jar.

THE BALL LIGHTNING JAR

The most common shade of this colored jar is green, and that can get you in the hundreds of dollars with the wire bale. However, the cobalt blue jar can get you \$10,000 or more. The jar also came in clear and lighter-colored versions.

VIOLET JAR BY COLUMBIA

The purple-hued jar was originally an error caused by adding manganese to the glass. But it caught on, and the company made it part of the lineup in 1905. Today, they're worth up to \$400.

DATING USING THE BALL LOGO

If you're looking at vintage Ball jars, in particular, you can date them using the script on the Ball logo. Online guides abound, but what you're looking for is usually the styling of the B (closed loops or no) and the two Ls. The recognizable script logo was first used in 1885; earlier logos were in print or a monogram version that included several initials.

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BUYER'S TIP

Beware of TNew-Looking Jars

Reproductions of nearly all the vintage Mason jar models worth anything abound. Beware of deals that look too good to be true, materials such as metal or rubber that looks too new and unscrupulous sellers purporting to have antique jars at low, low prices.

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