

'Perfect' collectibles

Dear Connie Sue,

I was wondering if you are seeing many of these jars with the old lids and what their current value is. My mom passed away last month, and I found 10 of them with the old lids. Someone told me they are selling for around \$20 each, and I knew you could confirm if that is true.

Gina King
Murfreesboro

Dear Gina,

I'm so sorry about your mother. I know it is difficult to make decisions about all the personal property in a home when there are family stories and memories in many of the items.

Ball and Mason jars are the most common brands. They may bring from \$20 to as little as \$5. First called glass cans or fruit jars, zinc-lid jars like these were made beginning in the 1850s. They were blown into a mold and threaded to accept the screw-on zinc lid. The canned goods were sealed then with a layer of wax. The wax was tapped with a knife handle then lifted by the blade's point to expose the bounty within. Wax was replaced with a rubber ring or rubber-rimmed disc by 1920.

As early as 1860, home canning was a typical activity for homemakers in small towns, cities and on the farm. By



Small versions of the classic Mason jar as salt and pepper shakers.

World War I, citizens were encouraged to plant Victory Gardens and preserve the harvest for lean winters. Home economists were employed to promote safe canning and preserving methods. And, especially in a small town, women had access to information, farm products and cash from salaries. They purchased more jars than big-city or farm families. It's not unusual for me to encounter hundreds of jars with decades-old food still intact, stashed away in dusty

cellars. Farmer families lived on a barter economy and may have accumulated jars more slowly in favor of farm necessities. But all good homemakers added to their jar stockpiles every year. They were purchased by the dozens. Tossing out an empty jar was just wrong!



At one time, Mason jars were necessities in many Tennessee kitchens. Canning allowed all types of food to be saved through cold winter months. Mason jars can be fun collectibles with their various shapes, sizes and colors.

All of your jars are aqua/green glass with a rounded shoulder just below the lid. Aqua and clear glass jars are the most common. Cobalt blue, black or milk glass jars are the rarest and may cost hundreds of dollars. Amber and dark green are a nice find and sell for around \$50. Jars made by lesser-known companies can be valuable because of limited production, and there is a market for jars with unusual closures. But color is the prime factor in determining value.

"Lightning" is the name of the glass jar lid with a metal wire that leverages the lid into place. Some think homemade white lightning derived its name from the large clear jars marked "lightning" rather than from the jolt it produced. A clear glass jar embossed with the word "lightning" is worth \$35. ☺

Find an interesting piece while cleaning out the attic? Want some more information on a prized heirloom? Then send your detailed inquiries to Connie Sue Davenport and look for her answers in future issues of *The Tennessee Magazine*.

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