

Preserving the Harvest -

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Today's topics:

- Why preserve?
- How preserving works
- Drying, freezing, and canning
 - Which method do you choose?
 - Basics of each process
- Choosing plants and varieties for preserving
- My personal experience
- Additional resources

Why preserve?

- Can control quality
- Can save \$\$
- Garden fresh foods in winter
- Reduce waste, use your excess harvest
- Create gourmet foodstuffs
- Create a pantry of readily available food
- Fulfill yourself – create another source of pride
- Connect with a past era
- Learn a new skill

How preserving works:

Drying:

- Without water, there is no bacterial growth
- Shelf life of approx. 1 year
- Store dry products in airtight container, in cool, dark, dry place

Freezing:

- Does not stop deterioration or bacterial growth (slows both down)
- Shelf life of approx. 1 year
- Store at 0 ° Fahrenheit or less

Canning:

- Kills bacteria, yeasts and molds; removes oxygen; deactivates enzymes
- Shelf life is indefinite, but quality and nutrition begin to deteriorate after 1 year
- Store in cool, dark, dry place

Drying basics: Herbs

Harvest in early morning, after dew has dried
For culinary purposes, harvest before flowering
4 basic methods: hang, screen-dry, microwave, and press
Check dryness by touching—should feel crisp like a cereal flake

Drying basics: Fruit

Harvest only top quality varieties, at peak ripeness
3 basic methods:
dehydrator—best
oven—low temp: 130° - 150°
sun—difficult in Pittsburgh, as it requires a number of sequential days of sun with little or no humidity
Use an anti-oxidizing agent for fruit that browns
Pack dried produce tightly in plastic bags
Shelf life of 6 – 12 months if stored in cool, dark, dry place
Shelf life of 2 years if stored in freezer

Drying basics: Vegetables

Harvest only top quality varieties, at peak ripeness
3 basic methods:
dehydrator—best
oven—low temp: 140° - 150°, with a fan outside to circulate the air
sun—difficult in Pittsburgh, as it requires a number of sequential days of 100°+ with little or no humidity
Veggies must be blanched first to deactivate enzymes
Pack dried produce tightly in plastic bags
Shelf life of 6 – 12 months if stored in cool, dark, dry place
Shelf life of 2 years if stored in freezer

Freezing basics: Fruit

Freeze fruit at optimal maturity (freeze same day as harvest)
Wash fruit in clean cold water, but don't soak
Sort out bruised, soft, decayed fruit
Dry pack—berries, rhubarb
Sugar vs. syrup pack
Depends on how you want to use the fruit
Select varieties that freeze well

Freezing basics: Vegetables

Freeze young, tender vegetables
(freeze same day as harvest)

Wash, sort, trim, and blanch

Blanching:

Blanching stops enzyme activity. Heating also softens veggies and makes them easier to pack.

One pound food for one gallon boiling water and blanch for time recommended

Immediately immerse in bowl or sink of fresh, cold water

Drain, pack, seal, label, and freeze

Select varieties that freeze well

Canning:

Biggest issue is food safety

Botulism is difficult to destroy in low acid foods.

A temperature of 240° - 250° is necessary.

Acid foods

Hot water bath

<4.6 pH

Natural or added acid (lemon juice or vinegar)

vs.

Non-acid foods

Pressure canner

>4.6 pH

Canning: Hot Water Bath Process

Wash jars, lids, etc. in hot, soapy water

Process your ingredients

Sterilize jars for 10 minutes in boiling water

Process lids & rings in hot water for ___ minutes (see manuf. directions)

Fill jars w/funnel leaving requisite headroom

Use plastic spatula to release air bubbles

Wipe rims clean

Apply lid & ring & tighten firmly

Put in hot water canner

When water returns to a boil, start timing

Remove jars from canner & cool for 12-24 hours

Check seal, remove ring, & wipe clean

Label jars

Store in dark, dry, cool place

Foods to Can in a Hot Water Bath

Jams, jellies, preserves, marmalades
& conserves

Fruits: raw vs. hot pack

Veggies: only tomatoes

Pickles & relishes: with added acid

Choosing varieties for preserving

See “Culture and Varieties for the Home Gardener” pamphlets

Other:

Pickles—use zucchini or pickling cucumbers

Tomatoes—determinate vs. indeterminate

Beans—bush vs. pole

Strawberries—June-bearing

Additional resources

<http://agsci.psu.edu> --

Cooperative Extension

Nutrition, Diet & Health

Food Safety

Home Food Preservation:

Let's Preserve

USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning

<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu> --

Culture & Varieties for the Home Gardener Series

Culture & Cultivars for the Home Gardener Series

Local Library