



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

1383 Arcadia Road, Room 140, Lancaster, PA 17601-3184

717-394-6851
 FAX: 717-394-3962
 E-mail: LancasterExt@psu.edu

May-June 2008

Dear Home Food Preserver,

Welcome back to another series of *Let's Preserve*. This year we will be sharing information with you about safe methods for canning, freezing, and drying the abundance of produce found in your gardens and nearby farmer's markets.

Although the cool days this spring have made for a slow start with our gardens, we look forward to a good growing season. By the time you receive this newsletter, local home grown strawberries will be available. Those are the best for freezing and preserves.

Many of you have your favorite recipe for strawberry jam. Although I have tried many versions, my favorite is the traditional freezer jam made with commercial pectin. It takes lots of sugar and has the best texture and flavor. I overheard my brother refer to it as "Martha's good jam."

Just a reminder to those of you who use a dial gauge pressure canner—it is recommended that you have the gauge tested for accuracy each year. We offer this test free at the extension office and in June will be testing gauges at several other locations. We also invite you to join us for one of our canning workshops. See descriptions on page 6.

Best wishes with your preserving,

Nancy R. Wiker, Extension Educator – FCS
 Penn State Cooperative Extension

Martha Zepp, Food Preservation Consultant
 Penn State Cooperative Extension
 College of Agricultural Sciences



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Feature Food of the Month – It's Strawberry Season

Strawberry Freezer Jam

Freezer jams take the prize for fresh flavor. Make some to use now, but freeze some to enjoy year round.

- 1 ¾ cups crushed strawberries (about 1 quart whole berries)
- 4 cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice*
- 1 pouch (3 oz.) liquid pectin

Measure 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups crushed strawberries. Place in an extra large bowl. Add sugar, mix well and let stand for 10 minutes.

Measure lemon juice into a small bowl. Add liquid pectin and stir well. Stir into fruit and continue stirring for 3 minutes.

Pour jam into freezer containers or canning jars, leaving $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace. Cover container. Let stand at room temperature until set (up to 24 hours). Freeze or refrigerate. Makes about 4 half-pint jars.

**The lemon juice in recipes such as this is an essential acid ingredient working with the pectin to create a good set.*

When we receive requests for jams and jellies using less sugar, we refer folks to the pectins for no or low sugar that can be made with Splenda® or with less sugar or even sweetened with frozen condensed apple juice. The freezer jam pectins also use less sugar. Keep in mind that jams made with less sugar will generally be softer than those using the regular pectin.

Setting Problems

Have you ever made strawberry jam that turned into an excellent topping for ice cream? What happened and how can you fix it?

Sometimes it takes a day or two for strawberry jam to set. Heavy rain while the strawberries are on the vine will cause them to be watery. If the jam has not set after 24 hours, you can add additional pectin to thicken it.

Freezing Strawberries

Modern refrigeration and freezers have extended our ability to enjoy this succulent fruit. When the supply is greatest and the price is low, extend your enjoyment of strawberries by freezing some. Just wash firm, fully ripe berries, remove the caps, drain well, and pack them into a freezer bag or vacuum seal them. Another method is to place the clean capped berries on a tray or cookie sheet and freeze them in a single layer before packaging them. Frozen unsweetened berries can be used to make jams, jellies, and cooked desserts.

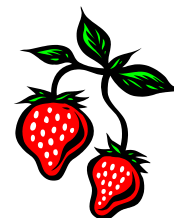
For sauces and shortcake year-round, sweeten berries before freezing. To freeze

whole berries in syrup, put the berries into containers and cover with sugar dissolved in equal parts water. For a dry sugar pack, add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar to 1 quart whole, sliced, or crushed berries and mix thoroughly. Let stand for 15 minutes to draw liquid. Make sure there are no sugar crystals left on the strawberries, bowl, or mixing spoon before packaging. Remember to allow $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace per pint for the liquid to expand. Freeze at 0°F or below.

Besides flavoring the berries, sugar helps to maintain the color and texture of the berries. Berries that are crushed can be frozen with sugar substitutes but generally yield a product that does not have the plump texture and good color of those packed with sugar.

Strawberry Facts

Strawberries do not continue to ripen after being picked. They must be picked at the peak of ripeness for the best flavor.



Cool nights and sunny days increase the sugar content in strawberries thus increasing the flavor and sweetness of the berry.

Keep strawberries cool—from picking to using. Heat makes berries soft and easy to bruise. If you pick your own berries, pick them in the morning when it is cooler. Keep picked berries out of the sunshine.

Refrigerate berries as soon as possible. Store loosely covered. Don't wash berries until you are ready to use or freeze them. Rinse with cool water. Don't soak berries. It is better to wash small amounts of berries at a time so that the berries are exposed to water for a shorter period of time.

Dried Strawberries

Before refrigeration, homemakers dried berries to use throughout the fall and winter. Because the flavor of berries is concentrated when dried, they make a good snack—few may be left for other uses. Strawberries are easy to dry and yield excellent results.

To dry strawberries, select one of the sweeter varieties that are firm, ripe, uniform in color, and free of defects for best drying results. Wash the strawberries and remove caps. Berries may be cut in half lengthwise or sliced about $\frac{1}{4}$

inch thick. Dry skin side down to prevent sticking to the drying racks. Sliced berries will dry faster but the cut side may stick to the rack.

Turning the berries over halfway through drying helps to prevent sticking. Small berries may be dried whole. However, they will take longer to dry because the skin reduces area for moisture evaporation. The ideal drying temperature is 130 to 140°F. Use a dehydrator or dry in an oven if you are able to set the oven temperature low enough.

The drying time depends upon the size of the berry pieces, exposure of air to cut surfaces, temperature, air circulation, and method of drying. Berries may take anywhere from 9 hours for small slices to 36 hours for whole berries. When sufficiently dry, strawberries should be pliable and leathery with no pockets of moisture. If desired, berries may be dried further until almost crisp. Unlike other fruits, strawberries should not be rehydrated because they will lose their firm texture.

Store dried strawberries in an air tight or a vacuum sealed container to avoid rehydration from humidity in the air. Dried berries will maintain excellent quality if stored in the freezer.

Besides snacking, sprinkle dried strawberries on dry or into cooked cereal; use them in puddings, ice cream, milk shakes, yogurt, pancake or muffin batter and quick breads. Combine with granola for a one-of-a-kind treat.

Strawberry Fruit Roll-ups

Roll-ups is the modern name for traditional fruit leathers. To make berry leather, cut fruit into chunks and place in the top of a double boiler. Cover and steam for 15 to 20 minutes or until the fruit is soft and a thermometer placed in the fruit mixture registers 160°F or cook the cut-up fruit in a glass casserole in the microwave oven on full power for 6 to 8 minutes per two cups of fruit, stirring every 2 minutes. (The purpose of heating the puree to 160°F is to kill bacteria such as E. coli that might survive the drying process if present. It also stops the maturing action of enzymes in the fruit, and speeds the drying process.) Puree fruit in blender with ½ teaspoon ascorbic acid

crystals or 2 tablespoons lemon juice per 2 cups of fruit to protect the color and help destroy bacteria during drying. The puree may be sweetened with 1 to 2 tablespoons of sugar, corn syrup or honey per 2 cups of fruit. Adding a sweetener will make the leather tacky and the sugar may crystallize if stored for several months.

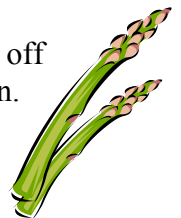
Because the strawberries have a high moisture content, you can mix the strawberry puree with applesauce for quicker drying. Spay a cookie sheet with vegetable spray or line with plastic wrap or Release® foil—do not use waxed paper or regular foil. Spread the fruit puree over the pan to a depth of 1/8 to ¼-inch. Dry in an oven or dehydrator at 140-145°F. If the oven temperature gets too hot, turn the oven off for a short time to reduce the temperature. It will take 4 to 10 hours to dry.

Dried fruit leather will be translucent and slightly tacky to the touch. No indentations should remain when touched lightly. It will peel easily from the pan. Remove from the pan while still warm.

Roll dried leather in plastic wrap or waxed paper. It may be stored as one piece or cut into 1-inch strips. Make sure the leather is completely dry before storing in an air tight container. It will retain good quality for up to one year in the freezer, several months in the refrigerator, or one to two months at room temperature.

Asparagus Season

Are you lucky enough to have extra asparagus? Try freezing it. Wash thoroughly and sort into sizes. Snap off bottom where stems begin to toughen. Remove scales with a sharp knife. Cut into even lengths to fit containers. Water blanch small spears 1 ½ minutes, medium spears 2 minutes and large spears 3 minutes. Cool promptly, drain and pack into plastic freezer bags, freezer jars, plastic freezer boxes, or vacuum package. No head space is necessary. Seal and freeze.



How Canning Preserves Foods

The high amount of water in most fresh foods makes them very perishable. Bacteria, molds, and yeasts grow rapidly in the presence of moisture and in a warm environment. These micro-organisms are normally present on fresh food and grow rapidly on the inside of bruised and insect-damaged and diseased food.

Oxygen and enzymes are present throughout fresh food tissues. During the ripening process changes take place in the food leading to spoilage and loss of quality. The presence of oxygen causes oxidation. As food is exposed to air, there is a loss of moisture.

Proper canning practices include carefully selecting and washing fresh food, peeling some fresh foods, hot packing many foods, adding lemon juice or vinegar to some foods, using acceptable jars and self-sealing lids, processing jars in a boiling-water or pressure canner for the correct period of time.

Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation, Univ. of Georgia.

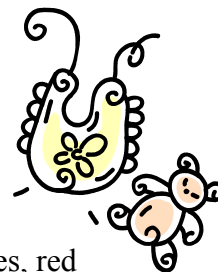
Canners—flat or coiled?

Some canners have a flat bottom and some have a coiled bottom. Some warp and change shape. Originally the flat bottom canner was designed for an electric range and the coiled bottom canner was designed for a gas range. If the canner bottom is not flat, there will not be complete contact with a flat heating element. Therefore, it will take longer for the water to heat to the proper temperature. However, since processing time starts when the water comes to a boil or the critical pressure is reached, the process will still be safe. It will just take a longer time to get to the point where timing begins. The product will be somewhat overcooked but it will be safe.

Canning Baby Foods -- Fruits

You can safely can chunk-style or pureed fruit using the procedure for preparing a specific fruit as given by the *USDA Complete Guide*

to *Home Canning* or the *Ball Blue Book*. Pack in half-pint or pint jars and process for 20 minutes in a boiling water canner. Half-pint jars are preferred.



Do not can pureed vegetables, red meats, or poultry because proper processing times for these pureed foods have not been determined for home use. Instead, can and store these foods using standard processing procedures; then puree or blend them at serving time. Heat the blended foods to boiling, simmer for 10 minutes, cool, and serve. For best quality, store unused portions in the refrigerator and use within 2 days.

Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation, Univ. of Georgia and USDA.

Reusing Foam Trays

Not A Good Idea

Is it safe to reuse meat packaging materials? According to Luke LaBorde, Food Scientist at Penn State University, reusing plastic wrap, foam meat trays, convenience food dishes, and egg cartons can lead to bacterial cross-contamination. These materials have been designed for a specific use and should be considered one-time-use packaging. Bacteria from foods that these packages once contained may remain on the packaging and then be able to contaminate foods or even hands if reused. Even when washed, the bacteria may remain in the porous structure of the containers. They have air spaces that will harbor food particles and microorganisms.

Freeze and Thaw

Cook Two, Freeze One (Planned-Overs)

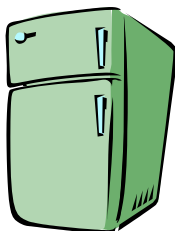
With time being a major factor in meal preparation, making extra food to serve at another meal is a time-saver. Here are some tips addressing safety concerns for foods that are served twice:

- Cool the food quickly. Separate and refrigerate the portion to be served for your next meal before you put the food on the table. This prevents the planned-overs from becoming dry or soggy or limp from standing at room temperature.
- Refrigerate planned-overs in shallow containers so that they cool faster. Limit the depth of the food to 2 inches. Loosely cover the food to allow steam to escape at first; then cover tightly when cooled.
- Soups and sauces can be cooled quickly by setting the kettle in a sink filled with cold water; stir occasionally and change the water as it absorbs heat from the kettle.
- Avoid letting perishable cooked foods sit at room temperature longer than two hours total—that includes the sum of the first and the second use.
- Freeze foods in portion sizes you will need for future meals—that way you will only need to defrost the amount you will use at one time.
- Pack foods tightly into containers or press out excess air when packing food into bags. Allow a small amount of space between the food and the top of the containers to allow for expansion of the food as it freezes.
- When freezing several packages at once, leave a little space between them so air can circulate freely and allow them to freeze faster. When frozen, move them closer together.

Thawing Foods

Thaw perishable foods in the refrigerator. **Never thaw perishable foods at room temperature.** Just one bacteria, doubling every 20 minutes, could grow to 64 bacteria in two hours and over 2 million bacteria in seven hours.

If a food is thawed in the microwave oven, cook it immediately. Microwave-thawed foods reach temperatures that encourage bacterial growth sooner than those thawed in a refrigerator. Then cook immediately to kill



any bacteria that may have developed and to prevent any further bacterial growth.

Heat any planned-overs to 165°F to destroy any harmful bacteria. This is higher than just “mouth warm”.

Reference: Alice Henneman, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County

Free Pressure Canner Dial Gauge Testing

Accurate pressure is essential for the safety of foods processed in a pressure canner. Pressure canner dial gauges should be tested for accuracy each year. Only the lid is needed for testing. New canners and new gauges should also be tested. There is no charge for testing dial gauges, and it only takes a few minutes. Pressure canners with weighted gauges do not need to be tested.

Lancaster County offers dial gauge testing on Wednesdays between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. It is best to call ahead for any schedule changes. There will also be testing available at the extension office on June 16 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Special Dial Gauge Testing Dates

Again this year, we will offer dial gauge testing at locations in the community.

Date	Time	Store	Location
June 12	1:00-3:00 pm	Weaver's Store	Leola
June 13	1:00-3:00 pm	Weaver's Store	Fivepointville
June 16	6:00-8:00 pm	Farm and Home Center	1383 Arcadia Road Lancaster
June 19	1:00-3:00 pm	Good's Store	Schaefferstown
June 19	6:00-8:00 pm	Good's Store	Ephrata
June 20	6:00-8:00 pm	Good's Store	East Earl
June 21	10:00-12 noon	Good's Store	Quarryville

Have a Question?

- Need to know how to do a boiling water bath? What causes soft pickles? How can you prevent liquid from seeping out of the jar? Martha is usually available to answer questions on Wednesdays from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Call the extension office at 394-6851.
- National Center for Home Food Preservation www.uga.edu/nchfp provides one of the best sources of information on safe food preservation methods. It also links the user to all the cooperative extension sites in each state.
- *Let's Preserve* is a free series of 13 flyers on canning and freezing a variety of fruits and vegetables available from your local cooperative extension office. They are also available from the Penn State Home Preservation website <http://foodsafety.psu.edu/preserve.html>

Workshops for 2008

Two workshops are planned for 2008. Both will be offered at the Farm and Home Center. Fee \$7.50 each.

✓ **Overcoming the Fear of Pressure Canning**

If the vision of a heavy metal canner with strange looking gauges scares you away from pressure canning, this is the workshop for you. Learn how a pressure canner works as we walk through each step involved in safely canning green beans, corn, and meats. (Optional: Bring your canner lid for testing of the dial gauge.)

Date: Tuesday, July 15, 2008

Time: 6:00-8:00 p.m.

✓ **Salsa**

Create tasty salsa using research tested recipes and learn basic canning techniques in the process.

Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2008

Time: 6:00-8:00 p.m.

To register for these workshops, please use this registration form.

Workshop Registration Form	
Name	_____
Address	_____
City	_____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone	_____
E-mail	_____
Please register me for the following classes: ____ Overcoming the Fear of Pressure Canning, July 15 ____ Salsa, September 9	
<u>Fee:</u> \$7.50 per class, per participant ____ Check enclosed made payable to "PSCE Program Fund"	
<u>Mail to:</u> Penn State Cooperative Extension, 1383 Arcadia Rd., Rm. 140, Lancaster, PA 17601-3184	
To charge Visa or Mastercard (circle one): complete the information requested below, signing on the line indicated. Please note: the address listed and the credit card billing address must match.	
Card Holder's Name	_____
Signature	_____
Account number	_____
Expiration Date	_____

Penn State encourages persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation or have questions about the physical access provided, please contact Nancy Wiker at 717-394-6851 in advance of your participation or visit.

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Cooperative Extension is implied.

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