



Well-Preserved Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Food Preserver:

Welcome to the "Well Preserved" newsletter. Several years ago Cooperative Extension Agents in the Capital Region developed a newsletter by this name. Martha Zepp, home economist, and I are resurrecting the newsletter, adding our ideas, and featuring some of the tried and true. This is the first of four issues dedicated to a variety of food preservation topics including canning, freezing and drying food.

We receive many questions about food preservation and will include some of them in the newsletter. We will also pass along some updated information that concerns home food preservation. You are invited to ask questions. If you have specific questions you would like answered, call, write or e-mail me.

Recipes and ideas for using home preserved foods and tips for giving gifts from the kitchen will be featured in coming issues.

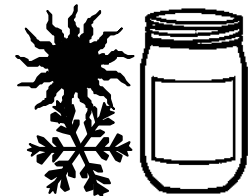
May you always be "Well Preserved."

Sincerely,
 Nancy R. Wiker
 Extension Agent - Family and
 Consumer Sciences

In consultation with: Martha Zepp

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Feature Food of the Month

Blueberry Pie Filling

The following fruit pie filling is an excellent and safe product. Each quart makes one 8-9 inch pie. Filling may be used as a topping on desserts or pastry. Clear Jel® is a modified starch that produces an excellent sauce consistency even after the filling is canned and baked. For sources of Clear Jel®, contact Cooperative Extension offices. Make a single quart first, and make a pie with it. Then adjust the sugar and spices in the recipe to suit your personal preferences. The amount of lemon juice should not be altered, because it aids in ensuring the safety and storage stability of the filling.

Ingredient	Quantities of ingredients needed for	
	1 Quart	7 Quarts
Fresh or thawed blueberries	3-1/2 cups	6 quarts
Granulated sugar	3/4 cup + 2 tbsp.	6 cups
Clear Jel®	1/4 cup + 1 tbsp.	2-1/4 cups
Cold water	1 cup	7 cups
Bottled lemon juice	3-1/2 tsp.	1/2 cup
Blue food coloring (optional)	3 drops	20 drops
Red food coloring (optional)	1 drop	7 drops

Quality. Select sweet, very ripe but firm, deep blue fruit.

Procedure for preparing blueberry filling.

Wash and drain blueberries. For fresh fruit, place 6 cups at a time in 1 gallon boiling water. Boil each batch 1 minute after the water returns to a boil. Drain but keep heated fruit in a covered bowl or pot. Combine sugar and Clear Jel® in a large kettle. Stir. Add water and, if desired, food coloring. Cook on medium-high heat until mixture thickens and begins to bubble. Add lemon juice and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Fold in drained berries, fill jars immediately with mixture, leaving 1-inch headspace, and process without delay.

Questions???

Although you can call or write anytime with your questions, Martha Zepp will be available on Wednesdays through September 12, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to answer food preservation questions. Call Penn State Cooperative Extension at 717-394-6851. You may also stop in the office to have your dial gauge checked for accuracy during that time.

?????

F.A.Q's (Frequently Asked Questions)

How do you freeze beets?

For best results, freeze beets that are less than 3" in diameter. Larger beets tend to have an undesirable texture when frozen. Cook beets until tender in the skins. Slip off skins. Slice, cube, or freeze whole. You can freeze on trays and package after they are frozen or place convenient amounts in freezer bags or boxes.

Beets are a low acid food and must be pressure canned. If you do not have a pressure canner, you can still can beets if you prepare pickled beets, which have a much higher acid from the vinegar in the pickling liquid.

Why do the undersides of metal lids sometimes discolor?

Natural compounds in some foods, particularly acids, corrode metal and make a dark deposit on the underside of jar lids. This deposit on lids of sealed, properly processed canned foods is harmless.

Can you freeze tomatoes?



Smaller tomatoes can be frozen whole. Larger ones may be quartered. Either way, remove the skins first (they tend to taste like cellophane). Pack into containers, adding salt if desired. Leave headroom for expansion. These tomatoes are best for cooking, soups or casseroles.

I like to cook up my own tomato mix of fresh tomatoes, celery, pepper and onion with a favorite herb blend, then freeze. This is a great base for sauces, soups and casseroles.

Tomato juice may also be frozen. Just quarter tomatoes and simmer five to ten minutes before pressing through a sieve. Allow adequate head space for expansion.

Is it necessary to exhaust a pressure canner?

Yes, it is very important to allow steam to escape for 10 minutes before closing the valve, or placing the weight on the vent. If the canner is not exhausted, the inside temperature may not correspond to the pressure on the gauge.



Equipment

Jar Facts:

Several of you have asked about jar bargains found at garage sales. Hundreds of jars at a fraction of the cost of new. Should you buy them? Just like anything else you get at a garage sale, you do not know how it was handled or how old it is. If you are not sure of the condition of the old jars, immerse in water and bring to a boil. Boil 15 minutes. If they are defective, they will break. Better to discover this before you fill with food and process.



Jars can be traumatized (roughly handled) -- when they are heaped in baskets or boxes, when they bang up against each other, when you use a metal knife to release air bubbles in the jars and let the knife hit the bottom of the jar, or the sharp edge scratches the inside, or if you scour jars with steel wool or kitchen scrapers.

Be a Jar Detective: A broken jar in your canner is aggravating and slows your canning day. If you look at the pieces carefully, you may be able to determine the cause. Jars have three basic breakage patterns. Here are some clues so you can do a little detective work and trouble shoot for your family and friends.

Thermal Shock – produces just a few pieces. It looks like the bottom fell out. This often happens to more than one jar in the load. It is caused by filling jars with cold food and liquid that is not boiling followed by plunging into water that is already boiling. Also caused by setting hot jars to cool on a cold surface or near a cold draft or open airy window or accidentally spattering hot jars with cold water. Also caused by scratches on jars or not enough water in pressure canner.

Pressure Break – produces a vertical crack that forks and divides. Caused by not enough headspace to allow for expansion; screwing jar lids on too tight so jars can't vent, cooling a pressure canner too fast, or allowing pressure to fluctuate too widely.

Impact Break – Starts from the point of shock and radiates straight out from there. Caused by bumping, dropping, or hitting with a sharp knife to remove air bubbles. Use a plastic or wooden tool to remove air bubbles.

A final thought, if you use jars for freezing, it might be a good idea to test by boiling for impact damage before you use them in a canner. Life in a freezer can be hard on a jar.

Use only Mason canning jars for pressure processing!

Cool Tools

Two newer canning tools on the market are a lid wand and a bubble freer. The **lid wand** is shaped like a stick with a small magnet on the end. It is used to remove flat lids from the hot water when you are preparing them. It prevents you from handling the lid with your hands, which could contaminate it and also from scalding fingers in hot water. The **bubble freer** is a long plastic spatula wedge used to free bubbles from the jars. Using this instead of a knife may save jars from damage tapping bottom with a knife. Look for both tools at stores where canning equipment is sold.

Terminology

Raw packing is the practice of filling jars tightly with freshly prepared, but unheated, food. Such foods, especially fruit, will float in the jars. The entrapped air in and around the food may cause discoloration within two to three months of storage. Raw-packing is more suitable for vegetables processed in a pressure canner and for foods that tend to lose their shape in cooking such as berries.

Hot packing is the practice of heating freshly prepared food to boiling, simmering it three to five minutes, and promptly filling jars loosely with the boiled food. Juice, syrup or water added

to hot packed foods should also be heated to boiling before adding to jars. Hot packing helps keep food from floating in jars and increases vacuum in sealed jars. Hot packing is the preferred pack style for foods processed in a boiling water canner.

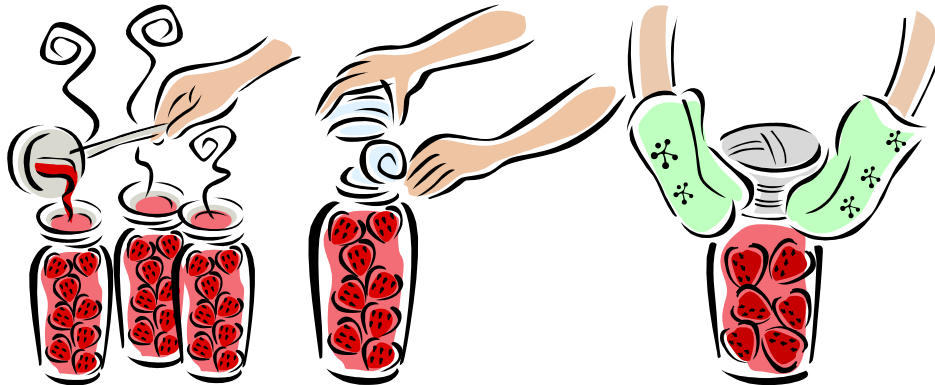
Cold packing is a term used in several ways. It may refer to packing the foods in the jars raw and then procedures for raw packing should be followed. Other times cold packing refers to the open kettle method of canning where hot food is packed into the jars and sealed without further processing. Open kettle canning is not recommended because there is not sufficient heat

to kill bacteria and molds that can cause food to spoil or cause foodborne illness.

Resources

Penn State Food Preservation Website

Looking for directions for preserving a specific food? If you have internet access, log on to the Penn State Food Safety website at <http://foodsafety.cas.psu.edu> and click on the food preservation button.



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