

Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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November 8, 2001

Dear Food Preserver:

With holidays approaching, many of our food preservation efforts are directed at preparing foods for special occasions or making food gifts to share with others. Some of the activities we do with food in the fall evolve into family rituals. Hiking to the woods to pick up hickory nuts whose flavor-packed kernels would be pried from the shells on a snowy evening around the kitchen table was one of our family traditions. And, those hickory nuts made the best cookies and cakes! Perhaps you have had similar experiences that bring fond memories that warm the heart.

Many of you have indicated that you are planning to share the fruits of your harvest with others. In the coming month there will be increased efforts to prepare and preserve food to give as gifts. Not only is the food appreciated, but also the effort to prepare it is a gift from the heart.

This issue includes information you can use as you make those special foods and some products that you can give as gifts.

Some of you will find a survey with this newsletter for you to let us know how you used the information in the Let's Preserve Newsletter. Please take a few minutes and let us know what you think.

May you enjoy the holiday season.

*Sincerely,
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*In consultation with:
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Feature Food of the Month

Chestnuts

It's chestnut season. They are more perishable than other nuts if not stored properly. Fresh chestnuts contain 40-45% carbohydrate, 5% oil, and 50% moisture. It is the high moisture that makes them so perishable. Spoilage is almost always due to mold. Here are some ways to prevent mold:

1. Treat the chestnuts in a warm water bath (125° F.) for one hour. A cooking temperature lower than 125° F. will not kill the mold organisms and a higher one will damage the nuts. After the warm water bath, drain and dry the nuts, then store in perforated polyethylene bags for up to two months in the refrigerator.

2. Dry the nuts. Place in mesh bags and hold at 40° F. for four days in a place that has well circulated dry air or put in a food dryer at 110° F. for 4 to 8 hours. This reduces the nut moisture to 10% therefore you can hold the nuts for up to a year in a cool dry area. Nuts dried this way must be soaked or steamed for 30 minutes before using.

3. You can store the freshly harvested chestnuts at 34°F. in the refrigerator. This is ideal temperature and moisture. If you don't keep the temperature below 40° you will probably find "critters" infesting the nuts.

4. Freezing is recommended only for cooked or dried chestnuts. Cook by spreading chestnuts in a single layer on a shallow pan and cooking in a 400° F. oven for 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven, cool and package in a freezer container.

Cooking Chestnuts

However you decide to cook these nuts, be sure you cut a slit or an "X" on the flat side of the nut to prevent explosions! You can roast in your regular oven by preheating the oven to about 400° F. and baking in a single layer on a shallow pan for about 20 to 25 minutes until tender. They have a toasted flavor this way.

For chestnut stuffing or cooking, cover nuts with boiling water and simmer 15 to 25 minutes until tender. Drain and remove shells and brown inner skin while warm. Proceed with stuffing recipe.

Microwave chestnuts if you like. Be sure to cut the slit as mentioned above. Timing will depend on the number of nuts and the size. They may "dance" and spit as they cook. Arrange them in a circle on a plate and allow them to carry-over cook a bit before you eat. Use five minutes for a cup full of nuts as a starting place. It is hard to say exactly because of size variation.

Other Nuts

Nuts need protection from oxygen in air and from high temperatures that may cause fats in the nuts to become rancid. Shelled nuts can be kept fresh for several months in tightly covered containers (glass is good) in the refrigerator. Shelled or

unshelled nuts can be kept in the freezer if stored in moisture and vapor-proof containers. Freezing the nuts will also kill any "critters" that may be in the nuts.

Pecans

Did you know that placing pecans in a damp place overnight before cracking them will prevent brittleness of the kernels when they are cracked? After shelling nuts, spread in a thin layer to dry 24 hours before packing in airtight bags for freezing.

Vinegars

Flavored vinegars add elegance and excitement to special dishes, add eye appeal when displayed in a decorative decanter on a window sill, and make wonderful gifts for the holidays. While flavored vinegars are easy to make, certain precautions should be taken to have a safe product. Use glass containers that have been sterilized ten minutes in boiling water. Scald lids and caps. If using cork, use new pre-sterilized corks. Use high quality herbs. Wash gently and blot dry on paper towels. Herbs can be dipped in a sanitizing solution of 1 teaspoon household chlorine bleach in 6 cups water, then rinsed and patted dry. Be aware that wine and rice vinegar contain some protein that provides an excellent medium for bacterial growth.

Store flavored vinegar in the refrigerator for best retention of flavor and freshness. Vinegar should keep for up to three months in cool storage and six to eight months refrigerated. If mold, bubbling, cloudiness, or sliminess develop, throw it away without using or tasting. Vinegars displayed on the windowsill or shelf as a decoration for more than a few weeks should be considered permanent decorations and not used in foods.

Lemon-Dill-Peppercorn Vinegar

Here is a recipe that I really like as a fresh seafood marinade or mixed with two parts oil for a salad dressing. For each pint place the spiral peel (colored part only) of 1 lemon in a sterilized container with 4 sprigs of fresh dill, and one

teaspoon whole black peppercorns. (If fresh dill is not available, a tablespoon of dried dill weed can be substituted.) Heat two cups of distilled white vinegar to 190-195° F. and pour over the flavoring ingredients. Put lid on jar or cork container. Set in a dark, cool place, stirring or shaking container each day to combine flavors. Let set until desired flavor is obtained. The vinegar can be filtered and returned to a sterilized jar or the vinegar can be used without filtering.

Undated Canning Lids

For many years home canners checked the age of their canning lids by looking for the last two numbers of the year on the lid. The canning companies are no longer dating lids. To keep track of the age of the lids, write the year you purchased them on the box when you buy them.

Citrus

As December draws near many organizations are selling fresh citrus and markets have some of the highest quality oranges, grapefruit, and lemons of all year. Fortunately, the keeping quality of citrus is good allowing us to use the fresh form for a long time. However, if you have an abundance that cannot be used before it spoils, citrus can be frozen by peeling the fruit, dividing it into sections, removing all membranes and seeds, slicing or sectioning, and packing into containers and covering with cold 40 percent syrup. The syrup may be made with excess fruit juice or water. Another winter specialty, Citrus Marmalade, differs from the traditional Orange Marmalade, in that it uses three different fruits. Note that it does not include added pectin because citrus peel is an excellent source of natural pectin. Be sure to include some of the white on the peel, as this is where the most pectin is found. This is a long cooking spread that requires the gel test for doneness. When the gelling point is reached, jelly breaks from the spoon in a sheet or flake. A candy thermometer can be used to test for the gelling point, which is 220° F.

Citrus Marmalade

1-1/2 cups thinly sliced grapefruit peel (about 1 medium)
1/2 cup thinly sliced orange peel (about 1 medium)
1-1/2 cups chopped grapefruit pulp (about 1 medium)
3/4 cup chopped orange pulp (about 1 medium)
1/2 cup thinly sliced lemon (about 1 medium)
4-1/2 quarts water, divided
Sugar (about 6-1/2 cups)

Combine fruit peels and 1-1/2 quarts water; boil 5 minutes; drain. Repeat. Add fruit pulp, sliced lemon and 1-1/2 quarts water; boil 5 minutes. Cover and let stand 12 to 18 hours in a cool place.

Bring mixture to a boil; cook rapidly until peel is tender, about 35 to 40 minutes. Measure fruit and liquid. Add 1 cup sugar for each cup fruit mixture. Bring slowly to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly to gelling point, about 30 minutes. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. Remove from heat. Skim foam if necessary. Ladle hot marmalade into hot jars, leaving 1/4 inch headspace. Adjust two-piece caps. Process 10 minutes in a boiling-water canner: Yield: about 5 half-pints.

Source: Ball Blue Book--Guide to Home Canning, Freezing, and Dehydration

Cranberries

Cranberries have been in the stores for about a month now. This tart little berry can be used for a lot more than cranberry bread and sauce. Buy several bags when they are less expensive and put them in the freezer for use later. Have you tried the dried cranberries often marketed as raisins are sold? These dried cranberries work well in breads and muffins and make a wonderful snack to eat out of hand. This product is made from chopped, sweetened cranberries and is difficult to successfully dry at home.

Cranberry-Lemon Relish

This is really good with turkey and chicken and wonderful in sandwiches.

*12 ounces fresh cranberries
Juice from 2 lemons
Zest from 2 lemons
1/2 cup water
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup walnuts, chopped fine
1 Tablespoon Grand Marnier or orange juice*

Swirl cranberries in a food processor or blender to coarsely chop. Put into a saucepan. Remove the zest from the lemons and add it, lemon juice and water to the cranberries. Add sugar and blend over medium heat until sugar dissolves. Cook 5 minutes. Add walnuts and Grand Marnier and cook 2 minutes more. Ladle into hot jars, wipe rims, and seal with 2 piece lids. Process in a boiling-water canner for 10 minutes. Makes 3 half-pints. Store in a cool dry place. This may also be stored in the refrigerator instead of processing.

Source: Canning and Preserving

Canning Wild Game

If the hunters in your family are planning on bagging one or more deer or other wild game, try canning the meat for a quick meal.

One of the easiest ways to preserve meat is canning strips, cubes or chunks of meat. The same method can be used for bear or venison. Choose quality, chilled meat. Remove any excess fat. If the meat is strong flavored, soak in a brine of 1 tablespoon of salt per quart, then rinse. Remove any large bones.

The hot pack method precooks the meat by roasting or browning in a small amount of fat. Fill jars with pieces of meat and add boiling broth, meat drippings, water, or tomato juice, leaving 1 inch of headspace. A teaspoon of salt may be added to each quart.

To raw pack, add 1 teaspoon salt per quart to the jar, if desired. Fill jars with raw meat pieces, leaving 1-inch headspace. Do not add liquid, this method makes its own.

Process all meats in a pressure canner, pints 75 minutes and quarts 90 minutes at 10 pounds pressure in a weighted gauge pressure canner or 11 pounds pressure in a dial gauge pressure canner in areas where the altitude is 1000 feet or less.

Use canned meat to make stroganoffs, curries, stews or ragouts. Most of the work is already done, and the meat is fork tender.

Mincemeat

Use venison for mincemeat instead of beef.

*5 cups cooked ground beef (about 2 lbs.)
1 quart ground suet
3 pounds raisins, mixture of dark and light
2 pounds dried currants
3 quarts chopped, peeled, cored, tart apples
1/3 cup finely chopped orange peel (about 1 large)
1-1/2 cups chopped orange pulp (about 2 large)
1 (8 ounce) package candied citron, chopped
4-1/2 cups brown sugar
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1 tablespoon ground allspice
2 teaspoons ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon ground cloves
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1 quart sweet apple cider or white grape juice
1/4 cup lemon juice*

Combine all ingredients in a large saucepot; simmer 1 hour. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. Pack hot mincemeat into hot jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Adjust 2-piece caps. Process pints and quarts 1 hour and 30 minutes at 10 pounds in a steam-pressure canner. Yield: About 6 quarts.

Source: Ball Blue Book Guide to Home Canning, Freezing, & Dehydration, 1995