



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Food Preserver,

As fall approaches my garden is coming to an end. The last of the tomatoes are hoping to escape the first frost while the carrots and turnips promise to produce for several weeks yet.

One of the joys of working in my yard and garden is the fragrance of the herbs--the sage, mint, tarragon, dill, and parsley. They have provided fresh culinary delights all summer, and as I write this I'm making plans to dry some to enjoy throughout the winter.

Another delight of this season is seeing the apple orchards ready for harvest. Trees are bent with beautiful fruit. Adams County celebrates the bounty of the harvest with a festival and tours the first two weekends in October.

Pennsylvania produces many varieties of apples. A good family fun activity is to get several varieties, slice them into wedges, and have an apple tasting party comparing flavor, crispness, and texture.

May you enjoy the last of your gardens and the bounty of the harvest.

Sincerely,
 Nancy R. Wiker
 Extension Agent—Family & Consumer Sciences

In Consultation with:
 Martha Zepp

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Feature Food of the Month

A Rose is a Rose? An Apple is an Apple?

When you think of a rose, what comes to mind? Red, pink, yellow, fragrant, climber, tea rose? When you think of apples, what comes to mind? McIntosh, Delicious, Royal Gala?

Learn to recognize varieties in fruits. Buy a single apple of several varieties and do a taste test. There are considerable differences in appearance, flavor, keeping quality, and texture. Some are better for eating; others are better for pies, or baking, or sauce. Ask the grower or roadside market what variety you are buying.

Red Delicious is usually preferred as an eating apple or in salads. Several apples are all-purpose like the Golden Delicious, McIntosh, Jonagold, or Crispin/Mutsu. Some hold their

shape better when cooked which is why I like the Jonathan or Golden Delicious in pies. New varieties are developed to take advantage of the best qualities of each parent. For example, the Ida Red has the unique flavor of the Jonathan but is larger like the lesser known Wagener. (Did you know that the Ida Red was named for the researchers who developed it, the Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station, and its deep color?)

Try combining several varieties when you make your applesauce or a pie--a blend is more interesting than one variety!

Here's a recipe for a jam using two favorite fall fruits. When cutting the pears fine and mashing them, I found they cooked up and were not visible in the jam. If you want pear pieces, mash them more coarsely or use a more firm variety such as the Keiffer.

Pear-apple Jam with Pectin

2 cups peeled and crushed fully ripe pears
1 cup peeled and finely chopped apple
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
6 1/2 cups sugar
1/3 cup bottled lemon juice
6 oz. liquid pectin

Wash, peel, and core pears. Crush well and measure 2 cups into a large saucepan. Wash, peel, core and finely chop 1 cup of apples. Add apple to pears and stir in cinnamon. Thoroughly mix sugar and lemon juice into fruits and bring to a boil over high heat; stirring constantly. Immediately stir in pectin. Bring to a full rolling boil, and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, quickly skim off foam and fill into sterile half-pint jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process the jars in a boiling water bath for 5 minutes. Yields about 7 to 8 half-pints.

Note: 1/2 teaspoon butter or margarine may be added to the fruit-sugar mixture to reduce foaming.

Select ripe fruits for jellies and jams. Underripe fruit results in a thicker consistency.

Herbs

Drying Herbs

For the best flavor, use scissors to gather leaves and stems on a sunny morning just after the dew has evaporated and before the heat of the sun has dissipated the flavoring oils. Leaves of herbs should be harvested just before the plant begins to flower.

Preparation for drying herbs includes rinsing the leaves and stems with cold water, either by submerging or holding under running water; shake off the excess water. Cut off any dead or discolored leaves or stems.

There are several ways to preserve herbs:

Room Drying: Cover a wire tray or a window screen with cheesecloth. Place a layer of herbs on the cheesecloth and cover with another thin layer of cheesecloth to keep off the dust and insects. Place the tray in a clean warm location with props underneath the corners of the screen to allow air to circulate. Turn the herbs over every day or two so they will dry evenly.

Oven Drying: It is very difficult to adjust the oven temperature to below 100 °F. which is best for drying. Cover the oven racks with cheesecloth and proceed the same as if you were room drying. Prop the oven door open slightly to let the moisture escape.

Microwave Oven: This is a good method to use for small quantities of herbs. Place 4 or 5 stalks with leaves between paper towels. Set the microwave timer for 2 to 3 minutes on a medium high power. Check to see if the stems and leaves are sufficiently dry. If not, reset the time for an additional 30 seconds and check again. Repeat this process as often as necessary to dry the herbs. CAUTION must be taken when drying in the microwave. If leaves are overdried, they will burn and so will the paper towel. Read the manufacture's directions for your oven.

Dehydrator: This method produces high quality dried herbs because it takes only 2 to 3

hours and has a controlled temperature with good air circulation. Set the thermostat of the dehydrator at 90-100 degrees. Do not dry herbs with other moist foods.

The most difficult and most important part of drying herbs is making sure that the herbs are dry. Brittle stems that break and seeds that fall from the chaff are indicators of dryness. Seeds should be brittle. If insufficiently dry, herbs will mold.

Using Dried Herbs

When using dried herbs, remember that they are usually 3 or 4 times stronger than their fresh counterparts because they have been concentrated. If the recipe calls for a fresh herb, you can usually use 1/3 to 1/4 as much of the dried. However, through storage the strength of herbs deteriorates. The safest way to use dried herbs is to start with a small amount, taste, and add more if the flavor isn't quite strong enough.

Here are some ideas for using herbs. A mixture called fine herbs uses equal parts of chives, chervil, tarragon or rosemary and parsley. Fine herbs is used to season meats, casseroles, fish, salads or egg dishes. A bouquet garni is made up of thyme, bay leaf, parsley, and celery leaves tied in a cheesecloth bag or tied in a coffee filter. It is used to season stock, soups, or stews. An easy way to add extra spark to a meal is by making a flavored butter to add to vegetables or to top hot rolls or toasted Italian Bread. Cream butter or margarine, then beat in herbs or flavoring. Extras can be packaged in small cups or "foil bricks" to freeze for later use. Why not try using your herbs for your own favorite combinations?

Frozen Herbs

Some herbs can be frozen for future use. Parsley, chives and dill freeze very well. Simply rinse and pat dry then chop and freeze. Dill weed and dill heads can be frozen. Overwrap plastic bags containing herbs with aluminum foil or freeze in glass jars. The flavor of some herbs migrates through plastic and can flavor its neighbor in the freezer. Chopped green onions with tops also freeze very well.

Shelf-life of Canned Goods

We have received several questions concerning the safety of using canned foods that are stored longer than one year. Food that has been properly canned will keep indefinitely but will maintain its best quality for one year. After a year some chemical changes do occur that affect flavor, color, texture, and nutritional value. This process occurs faster when foods are stored at temperatures above 70 degrees F.

Winter Squash and Pumpkins

This year our Horticulture Agent, Tim Elkner has been growing a variety of squash and pumpkins at the Penn State Research Farm in Landisville. He suggests that you select winter squash and pumpkins for eating that are heavy for their size, have shiny skin and no cracks, bruises or decayed spots. The stem should be attached. Avoid any with a soft spot on the stem end.

Store in a cool (50 – 60 °F.) dry area. They will keep for several months if they are mature and the stem is attached. Refrigeration may change the flavor and texture.

Figure about 1 pound of raw, untrimmed pumpkin or squash for each cup of cooked.

To freeze, wash outside before cutting. Remove rind and boil or steam, roast or microwave cubes of the flesh until fork tender. Drain well and mash or puree. Measure in one cup portions and place in rigid freezer containers or freezer bags. Freeze for up to one year. Puree can be used in recipes calling for the same amount of solid pack canned pumpkin. Do not freeze raw winter squash or pumpkin.

To can, wash, cut flesh into 1-inch cubes. Boil 2 minutes in water. **Caution: Do not mash or puree** (pureeing makes the product too dense for canning at home). Fill jars with cubes and cooking liquid, leaving 1-inch headspace. Adjust lids and **process in a pressure canner**.

Process pints for 55 minutes and quarts for 90 minutes in a pressure canner at 10 pounds of pressure. To use, drain jars and mash cubes.

Tips for Storing Canned Goods

- Label each jar with the date it was processed and the variety of the food.
- Use food which has been stored the longest period of time first. Rotate as older items are used.
- Remove screw bands so that they do not corrode and cause the seal to break.
- Store foods in a clean, dry place.
- Store foods in a dark place. Light destroys certain vitamins and causes some foods to fade in color. The cartons in which the jars were purchased are ideal for storage.
- Store foods in a cool place--between 50 and 70 ° F.

Questions???

Although you can call or write anytime with your questions, Martha Zepp will be available on Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to answer food preservation questions. Call Penn State Cooperative Extension at 717-394-6851.

Resources

Proper Care and Handling of Fish from Stream to Table

Proper Care and Handling of Venison from Field to Table

Proper Care and Handling of Game Birds from Field to Table

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

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