

# Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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May 22, 2002

Dear Food Preserver,

*I'm pleased to have Martha Zepp helping with food preservation information again this year. She is available on Wednesday mornings to answer questions by phone, send you information, or help you find a solution to a canning problem. In fact, she is the one who prepared this newsletter.*

*We will be using your suggestions from the survey last winter. Many asked for more recipes, so we are starting off with several ideas to use spring crops.*

*They say that the strawberries will be ready early this year. There's nothing like tasting a fresh picked berry, still warm from the sun. My dad still has a few dozen plants in his garden, enough for shortcake and jam. Mom prefers freezer jam because it has a fresh picked flavor.*

*Many of the local stores are stocking the shelves for the food preservation season. If you are planning to purchase a new pressure canner, Martha has included an article in this issue about what to consider when making that purchase. Keeping the old one another year? Check it over to make sure it is still in good condition.*

*Best wishes  
Nancy R. Wiker  
Extension Agent – Family/Consumer Sciences*

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## Feature Food of the Month

The following recipe is a freezer jam with flavored gelatin as the thickener instead of commercial pectin. Gelatin based freezer jams seem to be less sticky than pectin based jams. The gelatin gives this spread a good strawberry flavor without the berries. If orange peel is not available, one tablespoon frozen orange juice concentrate may be substituted.

### Easy Rhubarb Pineapple Jam

5 cups chopped fresh rhubarb  
2 1/2 cups sugar  
1 tablespoon grated orange peel  
1 (8-oz.) can crushed pineapple, in unsweetened juice, undrained  
1 (3-oz.) pkg. strawberry flavor gelatin

In Dutch oven or large saucepan, combine rhubarb, sugar, orange peel, and pineapple; mix well. Bring to a boil; boil 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; cool 30 minutes.

Stir gelatin into cooled rhubarb mixture until dissolved. Ladle mixture into 5 clean, hot 8-oz. jars or moisture-vapor proof freezer containers leaving 1/2 inch headspace; cover with tight-fitting lids. Store in freezer until ready to use. Thaw in refrigerator several hours before serving. Store in refrigerator for up to 1 month.

Makes 4-1/2 cups.

Source: Classic Pillsbury Cookbooks: Garden Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

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## Canning and Freezing

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### Uncooked or Freezer Jams

When fresh strawberries arrive in the market, I begin to think of the good freezer jam my mother made. No holiday dinner table was complete without “Grandma’s homemade strawberry freezer jam.” Freezer jam is quick to make because it requires no cooking and no processing. Therefore, the natural flavor and color of the fruit is preserved. This type of jam must be stored in the refrigerator or the freezer instead of on a shelf. Uncooked jam will mold or ferment if kept at room temperature. If you use the jam in a few weeks, refrigerator storage will do. Otherwise, store it in the freezer until you are ready to use it. It should be thawed in the refrigerator a few hours before use.

As in making any jam or jelly, the secret to making a successful no-cook jam is the correct proportion of pectin, sugar, and acid. Pectin helps the jam to set to the right consistency. Fruit contains pectin naturally, but the amount decreases as the fruit ripens. If a fully ripe fruit is used for making jam, you need to add pectin. Pectin will gel with a certain proportion of fruit, acid, and sugar even if the ingredients are combined when cold. It may take only a few minutes for the gel to

form, or it may take two or three days depending upon the fruit that is used

Pectin is available in liquid or powdered form. It is also available in a light form using less sugar than the traditional form. Each type differs chemically so that they are not interchangeable in a recipe. Refer to a tested recipe or the recipes that come with the commercial pectin. Tested recipes are available for freezer jams made from fresh or from frozen fruit. Some companies call them Quick ‘N Easy Jam recipes.

### No-Cook Strawberry Jam

2 cups fully ripe strawberries, crushed  
4 cups sugar  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
1 pouch liquid fruit pectin

Stem and thoroughly crush, one layer at a time, about one quart of strawberries. (If using the food processor, pulse to chop very fine. Do not puree. Jam should have bits of fruit.) Measure 2 cups of crushed strawberries into a large bowl. Add sugar all at once to fruit and mix well. Let stand 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir liquid fruit pectin into lemon juice. Stir pectin-lemon mixture into strawberry mixture. Continue to stir about 3 minutes, until most of the sugar is dissolved.

Pour into clean jars or plastic containers leaving 1/2 inch head space. Cover with tight lids and let stand at room temperature until set. This may take 24 hours.

Store in freezer for up to one year. If used within 3 weeks, jam may be stored in refrigerator. Makes 5 cups.

### Creative variations:

Sunny strawberry—Add 1 tablespoon grated orange or lemon rind.

Nutty strawberry—Add 1/4 cup slivered almonds or chopped pecans.

Lime strawberry—Substitute lime juice for lemon juice.

## Freezing Strawberries

Freezing strawberries provides a means to enjoy this seasonal favorite all year. For best quality, freeze strawberries on the day they are harvested. Select berries with fresh sweet flavor, deep uniform color, and firm texture. Smaller, misshapen, and seedy berries are suitable for making jams.

Remove caps and wash 1 to 2 quarts of berries at a time and drain. Avoid soaking berries. Berries may be sweetened with a sugar syrup or with dry sugar. To make a syrup, mix and dissolve 3 cups of sugar in 4 cups of water. Add 1 cup of this syrup per quart of prepared fruit. To make a dry pack, mix 2/3 cup dry sugar per quart of prepared fruit. Fill pint or quart freezer bags to a level of 3 to 4 inches from the top, squeeze out air leaving 1 inch headspace, seal, label, and freeze. Before freezing, bags may be inserted into reusable rigid freezer containers for added protection against punctures and leakage.

## Know Your Peas

**Sugar or Snow peas** are edible podded peas which have firm crisp flattened pods. Your clue to quality is that the seeds inside should be underdeveloped. If the peas inside the pods are fat and visible, the pods will be tough and stringy. These peas should have both tips snipped off and removed just before cooking or freezing. Remove the string on one side.

**Sugar snap peas** are edible podded peas that look much like the green hull peas—that is the pod and peas inside are fully developed, not underdeveloped like snow peas. They can be eaten raw, slightly blanched, or cooked. Sugar snap peas have two strings that should be removed before cooking.

Snow peas and sugar snap peas may be frozen, but are not recommended for canning. English or hull peas may be frozen or canned.

### Freezing directions for podded peas:

Freeze the same day as harvested if possible. Select bright green, flat tender pods. Wash, string, and blanch in boiling water. Blanch

sugar peas and snow peas for 1 to 1-1/2 minutes (depending on size) in boiling water. Blanch sugar snap peas for 2 minutes in boiling water. Drain and chill in cold water. Drain well. Spread in a single layer and freeze until solid. Package in moisture-vapor proof wrapping, excluding air. Label and freeze up to one year at 0 degrees F.

Note: Blanching peas will fix color, preserve flavor and nutrients. The freezing process itself will cause some loss of crispness. There is no way to completely avoid it. Long term storage of unblanched frozen vegetables results in disappointing color, flavor, and nutrition. Quick freezing as described above will help prevent limp peas.

**Freezing green peas:** Harvest when pods are filled with young, tender peas that have not become starchy. Wash and shell peas; blanch for 1-1/2 minutes in boiling water; drain and cool in cold water. Drain well. Package, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal and freeze.

**Canning Green or “English” Peas:** Wash drain and shell freshly gathered peas. Wash again. You may use either the raw pack or hot pack method. To *raw pack*, place peas loosely into hot jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Do not shake or press down. To *hot pack* peas, boil small peas (less than 1/4") 3 minutes; boil medium peas (1/4 to 1/3") 5 minutes. Drain; rinse in hot water; drain again. Pack hot peas into hot jars leaving 1-inch headspace. For either method add 1/2 teaspoon salt per pint and 1 teaspoon salt per quart, if desired. Ladle boiling water over peas, leaving 1-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Adjust two-piece caps. Process pints and quarts 40 minutes at 11 pounds pressure in a dial gauge pressure canner or at 10 pounds pressure in a weighted gauge pressure canner. Note: if peas are over 1/3", process 10 minutes longer for pints and quarts.

## Rhubarb

Although fresh rhubarb is at its peak through May and June, harvesting can continue through the summer if plants have adequate

water and don't wilt from the intense heat of July and August. Rhubarb can be found at roadside stands and in the supermarket, but the quality will be much better if it can be pulled from the garden and used before it has a chance to dry. Choose rhubarb stems that are bright pink, crisp, and free of disease or insect damage. Pull the stems from ground level instead of cutting them. At any given time, harvest less than one-third of the stalks from any one plant. Rhubarb leaves are poisonous and should never be eaten.

## **Cherries**

Sweet and sour cherries can be both canned or frozen. It takes about 18 pounds to make a 7 quart canner load and 11 pounds to make 9 pints. An average of 1-3/8 pounds makes 1 pint of frozen cherries.

Select freshly harvested cherries with deep uniform color and ideal maturity for eating fresh. Preserve them promptly. Cherries may be preserved with or without seeds.

Stem, wash, and pit them if desired. If you pit them, immediately place the cherries in cold water containing 1 teaspoon powdered ascorbic acid or six 500-mg vitamin C tablets per gallon to prevent stem end discoloration. If preserved unpitted, prick skins on opposite sides with a clean needle to prevent splitting.

### **Freezing cherries:**

Cherries may be packed with syrup or dry sugar. To make a syrup pack, mix and dissolve 2 -1/2 cups sugar in 4 cups of water for sour cherries; or mix 1-1/4 cups sugar in 4 cups water for sweet cherries. Add 1 cup syrup to each quart of prepared cherries. To make a dry pack, mix 2/3 cup dry sugar per quart of sour cherries or 1/3 cup sugar per quart of sweet cherries. To package, fill pint or quart freezer bags to a level 3 to 4 inches from their tops. Squeeze out air leaving 1-inch head space. Seal, label and freeze.

### **Canning Cherries:**

Cherries may be canned using your choice of water, apple juice, white grape juice, or more

commonly sugar syrup. A medium syrup is suggested for sour cherries and a very light syrup works well with sweet cherries. To make a very light syrup for a canner load of quarts, mix 1-1/4 cups of sugar in 10-1/2 cups water and heat to dissolve. A medium syrup can be made with 3-3/4 cups sugar in 8-1/4 cups water.

To hot pack cherries, put washed and drained cherries in boiling syrup, juice, or water and bring to a boil. Fill clean jars with hot cherries and cooking liquid, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. To raw pack cherries, fill jars with drained cherries and cover with your choice of boiling liquid, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Process hot pack pints for 15 minutes and quarts for 20 minutes in a boiling water bath. Process raw packed pints or quarts in a boiling water bath for 20 minutes. Cherries may be processed in a pressure canner for 10 minutes at 6 pounds pressure for both raw or hot packed styles.

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## **Pressure Canning**

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### **Test your Canner for Accuracy**

Just a friendly reminder about your pressure canner. If you have a canner with a dial-type gauge, it should be tested for accuracy every year. We have a testing device in the extension office and will be happy to check your canner. Simply come in between 10:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday mornings June through August. Call to make an appointment if other times suit you better. It takes about 10 minutes. Bring the lid only.

Pressure canners with the weighted gauge do not have to be tested for accuracy as they cannot go out of calibration.

### **Buying a Pressure Canner?**

Major decisions are what size to buy, what type of pressure gauge is preferred, and how much do you want to spend?

Sizes of pressure canners range from 10 quarts to 41 quarts. Capacity varies by size and brand.

Capacity	Quarts	Pints
10 quart	4	7
15 quart	7	10
21 quart	7	19
30 quart (2 racks)	14	19
41 quart (2 racks)	19	32

Small canners are less expensive and are best suited for home canners who preserve only small quantities of food. Large-sized canners using two racks have disadvantages as they are extremely heavy when fully loaded; may be too tall to fit between the range unit and hood or overhead cupboard; and require a longer exhaust and cooling time. Small pressure saucepans such as ones used for cooking a meal are not recommended for home canning.

You will need to decide between a pressure dial or a metal weighted gauge. A dial gauge will actually show the pressure inside the canner. You must read the dial and adjust the heat to control the pressure. Pressure adjustments for altitude are easy to make. A weighted gauge will rock gently or make a “jiggling” noise periodically to show that the correct pressure is being maintained. You can hear the jiggle and know when the canner has reached the desired pressure. Weighted gauge pressures are limited to 5, 10, and 15 pounds pressure.

Pressure canners are available from \$85 to over \$300. Do some comparison shopping to determine the best price available and the features that meet your needs.

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### **Plan Ahead for Home Canning this Summer**

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Elizabeth Andress, Extension Food Safety Specialist at the University of Georgia, offers these tips for planning ahead for home canning. Start by checking your equipment and supplies. Proper equipment in good condition is required for safe, high quality home canned food.

A pressure canner is essential for canning low-acid vegetables, meats, fish, and poultry.

Dial gauges must be tested for accuracy before each canning season. Check the rubber gasket if your canner has one--it should be flexible and soft, not brittle, sticky or cracked. Also make sure any small pipes or vent ports with openings are clean and open all the way through.

A boiling water canner is needed for canning other foods such as fruits, pickles, jellies and jams. The canner should be deep enough to allow at least one to two inches of water to boil over the tops of the jars.

Both types of canners should have a rack in the bottom to keep jars off the bottom of the canner.

Inventory your jars and decide if you need to buy new jars this year. Inspect those you have for nicks, cracks or chips, especially around the top sealing edge. Nicks can prevent lids from sealing. Very old jars can weaken with age and repeated use and may break under pressure and heat. Consider investing in new jars if you need to, and watch for specials at the stores. New jars are a better investment over time than buying used jars at yard sales or flea markets.

Mason-type jars specifically designed for home canning are best. Jars that use two-piece self-sealing metal lids are the recommended container in USDA guidelines. Always use new flat lids. Used lids should be thrown away. The screw bands are reusable if they are not bent, dented or rusted.

Make sure that you have up to date canning instructions. The most recently revised edition of the USDA canning guides is dated 1994. Canning books published prior to 1994 will not have safe processing times and/or methods. Watch this newsletter for new publications and web sites for the latest canning information.

Planning ahead can save you time, money, and frustration with home canning. Make it a happy, successful canning season by getting prepared before your harvest is ready.

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## Just a Reminder About Processing Times

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Processing times and pressure canning instructions in this newsletter are for altitudes below 1000 ft. Residents of Lancaster County can use these directions safely. If you live at an altitude above 1000 feet, refer to a recent canning guide for safe processing times and pressure canner settings. Using the processing time for canning food at sea level may result in spoilage if you live at altitudes of 1000 feet or more. Water boils at lower temperatures as altitude increases. Therefore select the proper time and pressure for where you live.

### Altitude Finder

Go to the elevation finder on the web.  
<http://www.topozone.com/findplace.asp>

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## Resources:

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Penn State Food Preservation Database:  
<http://foodsafety.cas.psu.edu/>

National Center for Home Food Preservation:  
<http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>

Ball Consumer Hotline: 1-800-240-3340

Let's Preserve fact sheets. A series of food preservation fact sheets on specific fruits and vegetables. Call your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office for these free fact sheets.

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

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