



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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August 2003

Dear Food Preserver,

When I was growing up, my mother would note, with satisfaction, which of the foods on the dinner table were from the garden. We all helped with the canning and freezing, often having special jobs. Dad would do the harvesting, Mom would supervise the blanching, peeling or cooking and my sister, Sue, and I put the produce in jars for canning or bags for freezing. Mom always managed the processing.

These days I try to involve my own family. When the vines are heavy with tomatoes, I like to make a tomato-vegetable juice blend and freeze portion sizes to make homemade tomato soup. The recipe we have included in this issue is from Letie Schadler, retired Cooperative Extension Agent from Lebanon County.

Questions we receive at our office indicate problems common to home canners. Remember to use safe canning practices. It is very important to use a pressure canner for low acid foods, like corn and green beans, and to follow recommended processing times.

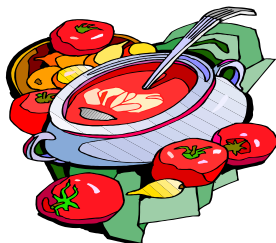
Happy food preserving.

Sincerely,

Nancy R. Wiker

Nancy R. Wiker
 Extension Agent—Family &
 Consumer Sciences

In Consultation with:
 Martha Zepp



What's Inside...

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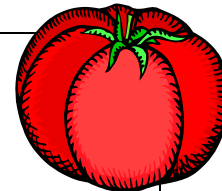
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Feature Food of the Month

Tomato-Vegetable Juice Blend

Sometimes called V-4 Juice, this is good as a beverage, in homemade soup, or as a tangy appetizer when combined with equal amounts of beef bouillon. *For safe canning, always remember to acidify tomato products, never use more of the low acid vegetables than called for in the recipe, and have the mixture boiling hot when you pour it into hot jars.*

Crush and simmer tomatoes as for making tomato juice.* Add no more than 3 cups of any combination of finely chopped celery, onions, carrots, and peppers for each 22 pounds of tomatoes. Simmer the mixture 20 minutes. Press hot cooked tomatoes and vegetables through a sieve or food mill to remove skins and seeds.

Plentiful Fruit

For canning: Add 1 tablespoon bottled lemon juice to each pint or 2 tablespoons bottled lemon juice to each quart jar. If desired, add 1/2 teaspoon salt to each pint jar; add 1 teaspoon salt to each quart jar. Reheat the tomato-vegetable juice blend to boiling and immediately fill jars leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Process pints in a boiling water bath for 35 minutes or quarts for 40 minutes. If desired, both pints and quarts can be processed in a dial gauge pressure canner at 11 pounds pressure or in a weighted gauge pressure canner at 10 pounds pressure for 15 minutes.

For Freezing: You don't need to acidify the tomatoes when freezing the mixture and you can be more flexible in the amount and type of vegetables and seasonings used. Allow 1/2 inch head space for pint and 1 inch head space for quart containers with a wide top opening. Try freezing the mixture in recipe-size amounts as in the Homemade Tomato Soup. Later it can be combined with equivalent amounts of the milk mixture to complete the soup.

**Cooking tip for making tomato juice—*

Work quickly as you wash, core, and quarter the tomatoes. If cut tomatoes sit around exposed to the air, the pectin in the tomatoes will be destroyed and the resulting juice will be watery and separate.

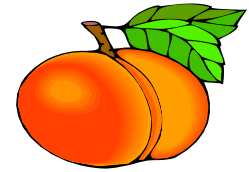
Homemade Tomato Soup

For the tomato mixture, refer to above recipe. The milk mixture is actually a very thin white sauce. Thickening the milk is a stabilizing technique and reduces the chance of curdling when it is reheated. It is not a thick soup when finished. Thicken two cups of milk with 2 tablespoons flour and 2 or more teaspoons of butter or margarine. Mix the milk and flour together while cold to reduce lumping, add the butter or margarine. Heat over medium heat until it boils and thickens, stirring often. Season to taste with salt and pepper, if desired.

The way the tomato juice and milk mixture is combined is important. Have ready equal amounts of the hot thickened milk mixture and tomato mixture. Slowly pour the tomato mixture INTO the milk mixture, stirring as you do it. Remember that the tomatoes are acid. If you forget and add the milk into the tomato juice, it will curdle almost immediately. Heat gently until serving temperature. This mixture will be reheatable. Never add more tomato mixture than milk mixture or the acidity becomes too high and you risk curdling.

Peaches

Sweet, delicious peaches are ready for preserving to enjoy in the colder days ahead.



Whether canning or freezing choose ripe, mature fruit without blemishes. A bushel of peaches weighs about 48 pounds and will yield 16 to 24 quarts. One pound equals three medium size peaches or two cups of sliced peaches.

To prevent peaches from turning brown while they are waiting to be processed, keep peeled fruit in water with vitamin C made by mixing 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid crystals or six 500-mg. Vitamin C tablets in one gallon of water, or use a commercial ascorbic acid product

Dip the peaches in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds to loosen the skins easily. Then dip quickly in cold water and slip off the skins.

Floating Fruit

A common problem in canning peaches is "floating fruit". Even when fruit is packed tightly into the jars and the air bubbles have been removed, raw packed foods will float. There is air in the tissue of all fruits when they are raw. When heated the first time, the air is driven off and the food shrinks. If you are using the raw pack method of filling jars, there is no way you can avoid having the fruit float. Another problem with raw packing is that you lose juice from the jars into the boiling water bath because of the vigorous boiling which happens in the jar. When the excess juice is escaping from the jars, sometimes tiny food fibers float along with the juices and get lodged between the jar and the sealing compound of the lid causing sealing failure. Jars will also be sticky from the syrup. Raw packing is a safe method but results in a poorer product.

Other causes of floating fruit include improper syrup concentrations and jars lids turned too tightly. Heavy sugar syrups will cause fruit to float more than medium or light syrup or juice packs. Jars lids screwed down too tightly will prevent proper venting and may cause fruit to float. Screw bands only comfortably tight—don't force them.

Hot Packing Peaches

What are the steps involved in hot packing peaches? Place enough peaches for one or two jars into the boiling syrup, water, or juice and bring to a boil. Remove and carefully fill jars. Fill with hot liquid within 1/2 inch of top. Process pints 20 minutes and quarts 25 minutes. (Adjust times for

higher altitudes.) Less syrup is needed when fruit is hot packed because the heating of the peaches will draw peach juice into the boiling syrup. If you don't heat the peaches through completely, they may still shrink a little, but not as much as if you had raw packed them.

Freezing Peaches

Some form of ascorbic acid must be added or the peaches will turn dark. They may be packed with syrup or dry sugar. To make a syrup pack, mix and dissolve 2 1/2 cups sugar and 1/2 teaspoon ascorbic acid in 4 cups water using 1 cup of this syrup to each quart of prepared fruit. To make a dry pack, mix 1/2 cup dry sugar and 1/8 teaspoon ascorbic acid per quart of prepared fruit. Follow package directions if using a commercial ascorbic acid product. Thawed peaches have a softer texture. Some people prefer to eat them partially thawed when a few ice crystals remain.

A Peachy Suggestion

A quick and tasty method of freezing peaches is to slice them in orange juice or orange-pineapple juice. Both juices contain adequate ascorbic acid to keep the peaches from darkening. These flavored peaches make a good addition to fruit salads or can be used as a special breakfast treat.

Grape Juice

Wash and stem grapes. Crush grapes and heat to 185° until fruit is soft—about 10 minutes. Strain through a jelly bag. Squeeze for greater yield. Let juice stand overnight in refrigerator for sediment to settle. Carefully pour off clear juice. You may want to strain again through cloth or paper coffee filter to trap tartrate crystals.



To can grape juice--Add sugar if desired; it is not necessary. 1/4 to 1/2 cup per quart is suggested. Mix well. Heat just until it begins to boil. Pour into clean, hot jars. Leave 1/4-inch head space. Process in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes (pints or quarts). Or use this alternative—pour into hot *sterilized* jars and process in boiling water for 5 minutes.

To freeze grape juice-- Pour juice into containers, leaving 3/4 inch headspace for pints and 1 1/2 inch headspace for quarts in containers with a narrow top opening. (1/2 inch for pints and 1 inch for quarts in containers with a wide top opening). Seal and freeze. If tartrate crystals form in frozen juice, they may be removed by straining the juice after it thaws. This is a natural occurrence. This juice can be used

as a beverage or for jelly (if unsweetened) after thawing.

Special Questions???

- **What is a Jelly Bag?**

--A bag made of cloth used to produce clear jellies and fruit juices. Purchase them in a housewares or canning section of a department store or buy a yard of gauze-like fabric and make your own—that way you can make them as large as you like. They can be reused. Wash them thoroughly and boil to be sure they're clean. Don't worry about the stains. The fabric should not be as loosely woven as cheesecloth or as tightly woven as broadcloth—something in between.

- **Why 5% for Vinegar?**

Have you noticed that most home canning books specify that vinegar needs to be 5% acidity. Vinegar is specified as 5% in order that you have vinegar of known acidity. Most vinegars in the grocery store, whether they are wine, cider, or distilled, are standardized at 5% acidity. Check the label to be sure. Some specialty vinegars have been diluted. Don't use anything less than 5% for pickling, and do not use homemade vinegar. There is no easy, practical way to check the acidity of homemade vinegar.

- **How Much Space?**

Jars are quite hot when they are removed from the boiling water bath or the pressure canner. To allow them to cool quickly allow several inches between jars



for air to circulate around each. I noticed in my kitchen that the jars taken out of the canner first and placed to the back of the counter are the last to seal—the place with the least air. Slow cooling can result in flat-sour spoilage. Micro-organisms called thermophiles can survive at high temperatures and can produce acid that causes the product to spoil. It is not harmful but it is an economics loss because of the undesirability of the product.

Unusual Notes on Veggies

Beets

Color Problems with Beets

Do you have a problem with beets *bleeding*? When you cook beets, leave about 1 to 2 inches of the top and all the tail on the beet. Wash thoroughly in several changes of



water before cooking. Leaving the stem and tail on helps to fix the color. Cook till tender, drain, slip off skins and proceed with canning, pickling or freezing. Do not use the cooking liquid for canning or making pickled beets or eggs—it is dirty. Throw it away and use fresh boiling water if you need to add water to the vinegar to make pickled beets.

Beets turn white? Bleaching occurs when beets are around too long before canning. They should be canned the same day as harvested if possible.

Beets turn brownish green after canning? There are some organisms in the soil which are iron forming and when you use liquid in which you cooked red beets as a canning liquid, you will sometimes have this reaction. Again, water used to cook the beets should be discarded and fresh boiling water used to can or pickle beets.

Freezing Red Beets??

Beets can be frozen but most people prefer them canned. Before putting the time, energy, and cost into freezing a large quantity, make a test batch. Try freezing a few for a week or so. Then thaw and serve some to see if your family likes the texture. Very fresh, small beets will have a better texture than those which are over 3 inches in diameter or those which were harvested and let set for several days. To freeze them, cook the beets as you normally would, skin, slice or dice and freeze.

Potatoes

Can potatoes be frozen? The results will depend upon the type of potato used, its age, and your standards of taste. Try a small quantity first to see what you think of the results. The United States Potato Board does not recommend freezing leftover potatoes because of their high water content which, when frozen, separates from the starch causing the reheated potato dish to be watery. Nevertheless, if you have lots of potatoes in your garden you may want to try.

Some guidelines for success—choose new potatoes, smaller potatoes, of the waxy type. Waxy potatoes include the red potatoes or Yukon gold. Stay away from the mealy type russets, baking, or Irish potatoes. The following suggestions come from the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension.

Garden Potatoes: Freeze them when they are about 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Wash and scrub the potatoes; you may leave the skins on them. Blanch 4 to 6 minutes if smaller than 1 to 1 1/2 inches, 8 to 10 minutes if larger. Cool, drain, and pack. To cook: add frozen potatoes to enough boiling water to cover. Cook about 15 minutes or until tender.



French Fries: Commercially these are fast-frozen giving a different quality than home frozen fries. However, if you wish to try your own, wash, peel, and cut potatoes into 3/8 inch strips. Rinse them quickly in cold water to remove the surface starch. Drain well. Spread the strips in a single layer on a shallow pan. Brush with melted butter or margarine. Bake in a preheated oven at 450 °F until golden brown and tender. Turn occasionally. Cool in the refrigerator, then pack, label, and freeze. To cook the frozen fries, bake on a shallow pan in a preheated 450 °F oven until brown and tender. Turn occasionally. Salt to taste.



Mashed Potatoes: Prepare mashed potatoes as usual. Let cool quickly, and form into 1/2 inch thick patties. Place on a cookie sheet and freeze. As soon as they are frozen solid, pack them in containers or freezer bags. Label and place packages in the freezer. To serve, fry potatoes in butter until brown or brush them with melted fat and broil. (I defrosted some of these in the microwave oven, topped them with cheese, and cooked them at 80% power until they were hot and the cheese melted.)

Stuffed Baked Potatoes: Stuffed baked potatoes can also be frozen. Remove the cooked potato from the skin. Mash it; then return it to the skin. You may add milk, butter, and seasoning if desired. Wrap and freeze. To serve, remove the wrap and bake in 425° F oven for 30 minutes. Use within 2 to 4 weeks.

Storing Potatoes

Store potatoes in a cool, dark place that is well ventilated. The ideal storage temperature is 45 to 50° F. Do not refrigerate potatoes. Potatoes stored below 40°F will develop a sweet taste due to the conversion of starch to sugar in the tubers. This increased sugar will cause potatoes to darken when cooked at high temperatures.

Cold temperatures before, during, and after harvest can cause the purple discoloration in the center and veins of some potatoes. The potato is perfectly fine to eat.

Cold temperatures also cause potatoes to turn black or gray when cooked. While storing potatoes in the refrigerator is not recommended, if you do, letting the potato warm gradually to room temperature before cooking can reduce the discoloration.

Avoid prolonged exposure to light which causes potatoes to turn green. The green on the skin of a potato is the build-up of a chemical called Solanine.

It produces a bitter taste and, if eaten in large quantity, can cause illness. This is unlikely, however, because of the bitter taste. If there is slight greening, cut away the green portions of the potato skin before cooking and eating it.

A warm, moist environment encourages sprouting of the potato. Sprouts are a sign that the potato is trying to grow. Cut the sprouts away before cooking or eating the potato.

Preservation Classes Continue

There is still time to register for the following food preservation classes. All classes will be held in the Extension Training Room, which is located on the lower level of the Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster, PA.

The Art and Science of Drying Food



You don't have to have special equipment to dry food. Learn basic methods of drying including oven drying, using a dehydrator, microwave drying, and air-drying. Ideas

for using dehydrated foods will be included.

Date: **Thursday, August 14, 2003**
 Time: **9:30 – 11:30 a.m.**
 Cost: \$5.00
 Instructor: Martha Zepp

Date: **Thursday, August 14, 2003**
 Time: **7:00-9:00 p.m.**
 Cost: \$5.00
 Instructor: Martha Zepp

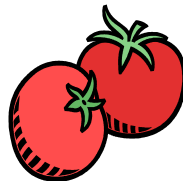
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Workshop Title _____
Time: _____
Cost _____
Name _____
Address _____

Phone (Home) _____
(Work) _____

Totally Tomatoes

Salsa, dried, juice or sauce; tomatoes are an easy to grow versatile food found in most gardens. Receive an update on tomato preserving methods. Information will be included on selection of tomatoes for preserving,



making juice, salsa, canning, drying, and more.

Date: **Monday, August 25, 2003**
 Time: **7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**
 Cost: \$5.00
 Instructor: Nancy Wiker

A Pickle is More Than a Cucumber



This workshop will introduce you to quick and easy ways of making fruit and vegetable pickles and relishes. Learn the function of ingredients, which ingredients can be adjusted, and processing secrets.

Date: **Tuesday, September 9, 2003**
 Time: **9:30 – 11:30 a.m.**
 Cost: \$5.00
 Instructor: Martha Zepp

Date: **Tuesday, September 9, 2003**
 Time: **7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**
 Cost: \$5.00
 Instructor: Martha Zepp

More workshops continued on page 6

Send completed forms with payment to:
 Workshops, Penn State Cooperative Extension, 1383
 Arcadia Rd., Room 1, Lancaster, PA 17601-3184.

✂-----

Workshop Title _____
Time: _____
Cost _____
Name _____
Address _____

Phone (Home) _____
(Work) _____

Wild Game Meat Food Safety

This workshop includes information on inspecting game animals for disease, updated information on field dressing and handling of wild game, and proper processing to prevent food borne illness. With deer season occurring earlier in the fall and warm weather likely,



it is more important than ever for hunters to handle game meat properly. Warm conditions have the potential to cause more food borne illness, especially when hunters improperly handle or process their deer.

Date: **Monday, September 29, 2003**

Time: **7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

Cost: \$5.00

Instructors: Nancy Wiker, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent, and guest.

Extra Special

Nothing is as special as a gift you have made yourself. These unique recipes are ready at a moment's notice to share with family and friends. This workshop will include ideas for extra special home preserved fancy foods and nifty packaging tricks.



Date: **Thursday, October 23, 2003**

Time: **9:30 – 11:30 a.m.**

Cost: \$5.00

Instructor: Nancy Wiker

Date: **Thursday, October 23, 2003**

Time: **7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

Cost: \$5.00

Instructor: Nancy Wiker



Resources

Information about potatoes from the United States Potato Board: <http://www.potatohelp.com>

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

National Center for Home Food Preservation:

<http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>

Questions: Call Penn State Cooperative Extension—Lancaster County 394-6851—Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Pressure canner checks for dial gauges continue to be available Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

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

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.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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