



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Food Preserver:

Welcome to the 2003 edition of the "Well Preserved" newsletter. You will be receiving four issues devoted to a variety of subjects. Here at the cooperative extension office we are looking forward to meeting many of you at the workshops that will be offered this summer and fall. Included with this newsletter is a brochure describing the classes.

With summer approaching, I'm looking forward to the fresh produce from my garden and from the local farm markets. Even now I'm enjoying rhubarb from my garden. To get ready for the canning season, I've cleaned shelves, tidied up the jars, and discarded jars of food that have shown quality loss.

Martha Zepp will again be helping with food preservation information. She is available Wednesday mornings to answer questions by phone, send you information, or help you find a solution to a canning problem. She will also test pressure canner gauges.

Best wishes for a productive food preservation season.

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

*In consultation with:
Martha Zepp*

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Feature Foods of the Month

Strawberry-Rhubarb Jelly

With the abundance of strawberries and rhubarb at this time of year, here is a recipe that combines both.

- 1-1/2 lbs. red stalks of rhubarb
- 1-1/2 quarts ripe strawberries
- 1/2 tsp. butter or margarine to reduce foaming (optional)
- 6 cups sugar
- 6 oz. liquid pectin (2 pouches)

Procedure: Wash and cut rhubarb into 1-inch pieces and blend or grind. Wash, stem, and crush strawberries, one layer at a time, in a saucepan.

Place both fruits in a jelly bag or double layer of cheesecloth and gently squeeze out juice. Measure 3-1/2 cups of juice into a large saucepan. Add butter and sugar, thoroughly mixing into juice. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Immediately stir in pectin. Bring to a full rolling boil and boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, quickly skim off foam, and fill sterile jars, leaving 1/4 inch headspace. Adjust two piece caps. Process 5 minutes in a boiling-water canner. Yield: about 7 half-pints.

Strawberries!!!!

It is important to select berries according to intended use—especially so when you are freezing berries. All strawberries, regardless of variety, will “collapse” to some degree when they thaw simply because a strawberry is made up mostly of water (juice) contained within fragile cell walls. When the berries freeze the water forms ice crystals that punch holes in the cell walls. When the berries thaw, the juice leaks out and the berries collapse. Berries that hold their shape the best have a very firm texture and are not hollow. Usually this means that the best freezing berries are medium sized and solid. Some varieties that are suitable for freezing are allstar, earliglow, guardian, redchief, sparkle, tribute, and tristar. Homegrown varieties are best for jams and freezing. Strawberries imported from California or Florida are best for eating fresh. Very often those great big juicy, fragrant berries with the hollow centers that are so good dipped in chocolate or eaten raw are a disappointment when frozen. To learn more about the subtleties of different strawberries, buy more than one variety and have a “berry tasting” to compare the differences between the varieties.

Handling Fresh Strawberries

Berries are very fragile and perishable. When picking, use shallow containers so the weight of the berries on top of each other does not bruise them. Do not pour them from one place to another because it will bruise the berries. Avoid leaving berries in a hot car for any length of time because too much heat as in the trunk of a car or setting in a parked car can quickly destroy perfect

berries. Direct sunlight is not good for freshly picked berries either. Process the berries the same day they have been picked if possible. They will not ripen after picking. Do not pick or buy berries with pale or white tips. The flavor is not developed, and if you are making jam, they may react differently to the jelling agents than fully ripe berries. If you take children or first time adult pickers with you to pick your own berries, instruct them on what you are looking for size-wise and maturity-wise.

Rhubarb

The freshest, highest quality rhubarb is available through May and June. If you have an abundance of rhubarb, try freezing some. Remember to pull the stems from the ground instead of cutting them. Choose bright pink, crisp stems that are free of insect damage.

The individually quick freezing (IQF) method works well for rhubarb. Spread a single layer of cut rhubarb on trays, freeze until firm, then put in air-tight bags or containers. This method allows you to remove as much as you want for cooking later. The frozen rhubarb can be used to make delicious cobblers, crisps, pies, and sauce. Put the amount you need for your favorite recipes in a package to save time measuring later. If you use the sugar pack method of freezing rhubarb, remember to subtract the amount of sugar in each pack from any needed in a recipe you are preparing.

Many rhubarb products can be made ahead and frozen, and thus, be ready to use when taken from the freezer and defrosted. Breads, cakes, cobblers, and some pies freeze well, but don't freeze rhubarb custard pies. Rhubarb-Pineapple Sauce is one of my favorites. Sauces made with tapioca freeze well—avoid freezing sauce made with cornstarch or flour because the sauce breaks down when frozen. If you don't like the gelatinous texture of the instant tapioca, just pulverize it in a coffee grinder or blender or buy tapioca starch (from gourmet food shops) which is already finely ground.

Rhubarb Pineapple Sauce

20-ounce can crushed pineapple, juice packed
2 tablespoons instant tapioca

1-1/2 cups sugar
6 cups rhubarb, cut in 1-inch pieces
1-1/2 cups crushed pineapple

Drain pineapple juice from can (about 3/4 to 1 cup) into a 3-quart saucepan. Add tapioca and sugar. Stir. Let set 5 minutes.

Add rhubarb and bring to a boil; cover and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until rhubarb is tender and tapioca is clear, 8-10 minutes. (Watch to avoid boil over.) Add crushed pineapple. Chill. May be frozen in small containers.



This sauce has the texture of a homemade pudding. Use less tapioca if a thinner sauce is desired.

Canners

Steam Canner Concerns

Because steam canners are being sold locally, a word of caution needs to be given. The use of a steam canner is not recommended as a safe canning procedure by the USDA because process times for use with steam canners have not been adequately tested, heat distribution inside a steam canner is uneven, and pockets of air trapped between jars or under the dome can cause cold spots where temperatures are below 212°F. For these reasons they are not recommended for either high- or low-acid foods. Also, don't confuse the name with a steam pressure canner. Yes, a pressure canner does process the food surrounded by steam, but it is under pressure and processes food at temperatures up to 240°F. A steam canner is a lightweight upside down kettle over a smaller pan that is not a sealed unit capable of producing the temperatures of a pressure canner.

Pressure Canner Safety

Is a pressure canner safe to use? The answer to that question is yes. Today's pressure canners are designed for safety. They are much lighter with thinner walls than older models. Most of

them have turn-on lids fitted with gaskets that fit between the lid and pan. The gasket expands during heating to give an airtight seal. (There is one model that is heavier that has a screw-on lid without a gasket.) All canners have a safety valve or plug that acts as a safety release if the canner gets above 25 pounds pressure. Newer model canners have a lid lock that prevents you from opening the canner while there is still pressure in it.

A pressure canner is defined as one that will hold at least four quart jars. Smaller kettles are referred to as pressure cookers and are not recommended for canning because they cool down too quickly to maintain the higher temperatures needed to destroy harmful bacteria

Venting the Pressure Canner

Always vent the canner for ten minutes before closing the steam vent. Air trapped in a pressure canner lowers the temperature obtained for a given pressure. This causes under-processing. To vent a canner, heat the sealed canner on high with the vent port uncovered until the water boils causing a visible funnel of steam that is continuously escaping the canner. After ten minutes of continuous steam, the steam vent can be closed to begin pressurizing the canner. The canner will then pressurize in the next three to five minutes.

Pressure Canning Tips

- Constantly monitor the pressure during processing. Loss of pressure at any time can result in under-processed and unsafe food.
- If the pressure goes below the recommended amount at any time, bring the canner back to the correct pressure and begin the timing process over. Start from the beginning and use the total original process time.
- Quick and large pressure variations may cause unnecessary liquid losses from jars.
- Let the canner cool down naturally. The canner is de-pressurizing while it is cooling. Do not cool the canner under cold running water or open the vent port before the canner is fully depressurized.

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 dial gauge 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.



Tips for Time Management

Managing Food Preservation Time



To insure the most efficient home canning or freezing operation:

- Have necessary equipment and supplies on hand.
- Have countertops clean for more working space.
- Plan simple meals and other activities so as not to interfere with canning or freezing.
- Know the capacity of your canner and how long the total heat process will take.

How Long Does It Take?

It is easy to under estimate the amount of time needed to do a canner load of food. No matter how much food you have to process, only wash and prepare the amount you can get into one canner load at a time. It won't pay in the long run to have great amounts of foods washed, cut, being heated, waiting to be canned. To retain the most nutrients, foods should be processed as quickly as possible. Unnecessary or prolonged

heating also causes nutrient loss and may affect the texture of the food, such as increasing the separation of tomato juice.

When processing canned foods you have to count the length of processing time plus the time you need to fill jars, wipe sealing edges, and apply lids. If using a boiling water bath canner, you also have to count the time needed for the water to return to a rolling boil. When using a pressure canner, exhaust and cooling time can add as much as an hour to the actual processing times. For example, when directions for canning whole kernel corn in quarts call for processing 85 minutes, you can assume that one canner load will require a total time of 145 minutes or 2 hours and 25 minutes.

Freezing Notes

Don't overload your freezer with too much raw food. Avoid freezing more than two pounds of raw food per cubic foot of freezer space per day. Freezing more than this at one time will result in a higher temperature in the freezer making it take longer for the food to freeze. This will cause larger and more numerous ice crystals and mushy food later. The freezer can be set at its coldest setting several hours before adding new food to hasten its freezing. Spread packages over the freezer in direct contact with a refrigerated surface leaving space between containers so that they freeze more quickly. Some freezer manuals indicate the location of the coldest shelves in the freezer and suggest placing products on these shelves. Always maintain the freezer temperature at 0° F or below.

Blanch, chill, package, and freeze small batches of food at a time. Don't let warm, blanched food sit around at room temperature waiting to go into the freezer. This results in color, flavor, and nutrient loss.

Resources

Penn State Food Preservation Database:

<http://foodsafety.cas.psu.edu/>

National Center for Home Food Preservation:

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

Penn State Cooperative Extension—Lancaster County 394-6851

Ball Consumer Hotline: 1-800-240-3340 and

<http://www.homecanning.com/>

Kraft Foods (Sure Jell and Certo recipes)

<http://web.kraftfoods.com>

Let's Preserve fact sheets are being revised. These fact sheets on specific fruits and vegetables will be available later this summer. Call your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office for these free fact sheets.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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