



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Home Food Preserver,

Welcome back to another season of the *Let's Preserve Newsletters*. This year, Martha will be preparing a series of four newsletters for the home food preserver packed with information and ideas about freezing, canning, drying as well as other methods of preserving foods.

Each spring we look forward to tasting the first strawberries from the garden. I watch for the first ripened strawberry so I can taste it before the birds. We always grew our own berries at home and could go out and pick a quart or two just before dinner.

My mother makes individual biscuit shortcakes that catch all the strawberry juices. She serves them in a soup bowl with about a pint of crushed berries on each – enough for a meal rather than a dessert. Over the years we have tried other varieties of the shortcake, but always come back to our family favorite.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. If you have food preservation questions or need to have your dial gauge tested Martha will be in on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Join us for one or more of our workshops this season.

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What's Inside

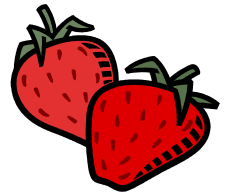
Feature Food of the Month--
 Strawberries

- Strawberry Shortcakes
- More on Strawberry Shortcake
- The Best Berry
- Freezing Berries
- Gingered Spring Jam

- The Pectin Mystery
- A Better Tool for the Job
- Can You Pass the Test?
- Pressure Canner

- Pressure Canner Check List
- Tips for Pressure Canner Care
- Dial Gauge Testing

- Questions
- Watch the Temperature
- Answers to: Can You Pass the Test?
- Food Preservation Workshops
- Resources



Feature Food of the Month

Strawberries

Enjoy it fresh now, make an extra batch and enjoy it later with frozen berries. This biscuit type shortcake can be wrapped in vapor proof plastic or foil and frozen for up to 3 months.

Strawberry Shortcakes

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon dried orange peel*
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup butter
- 1 beaten egg
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons milk

Preheat oven to 450°F. Stir flour in canister to incorporate air. Lightly spoon flour into measuring cup and level. Stir together flour, sugar, baking powder, orange peel, and salt. Cut in butter with a pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. In a small bowl combine egg and milk; add all at once to dry ingredients and stir just to moisten. Knead gently on a lightly floured surface about 12 times. Pat or roll to ½-inch thickness. Cut into 9 biscuits with a floured 2½-inch biscuit cutter or cut lengthwise and crosswise twice to form 9 squares. Bake on an ungreased baking sheet in a 450°F. oven about 10 minutes or till golden brown.

*If using freshly grated orange peel, add it with the egg and milk.

To assemble shortcake, split biscuit into 2 layers, top with sweetened berries, and whipped cream, cream, or milk.

Shortcakes are suitable for the base of a variety of fruits—try them later with peaches, raspberries, or blueberries.

The secret to mixing shortcake is to not overmix the batter and to have enough milk for moistness and still be able to handle the dough.

More on Strawberry Shortcake

You are probably in the midst of enjoying fresh juicy strawberries from your garden or local markets. As one of the first fruits of the season, they are enjoyed by themselves but are made special when combined with cake or biscuits to make strawberry shortcake. It is interesting to see the many ways in which the shortcake is made. The shortcake that I was familiar with growing up was a plain, one layer round butter type cake. A wedge of the cake was split and topped with strawberries that were sweetened with sugar to make a juicy syrup over them. We seldom added whipped cream, but frequently added milk. On special occasions, shortcake was served with ice cream.

Later on I discovered those little grocery store sponge cake cups designed to hold the fruit filling. I was in college before I had shortcake that looked like a biscuit—the form that seems to be the Lancaster County favorite.

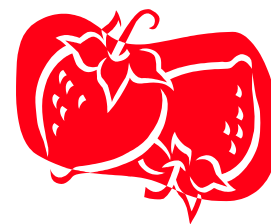
Many versions of the classic recipe can be found. Recipes with more shortening will be more flakey while more sugar in the recipe will make it more tender and sweet. Over-mixing the dough will make it tough. Adequate moisture, usually milk, helps develop structure without making it too dry.

Here are some other ideas for preparing shortcake. Bake cupcakes using a yellow cake mix, place in a bowl, top with sweetened strawberries. For

a health conscious version of shortcake, light biscuit mix combined with vegetable oil instead of margarine provides less saturated fat than traditional shortcake. However, it will not make as “short” or flakey of a biscuit. For a refreshing twist, add grated lemon peel or a pinch of nutmeg to any shortcake batter. There is even a recipe for chocolate shortcake where ¼ cup cocoa is substituted for an equal amount of flour.

The Best Berry

Berries don't like it too hot—so pick them early in the morning or in the evening. The best berries are known to seek shelter under the leaves. Look for plump, brightly colored berries with a strong strawberry fragrance. Big berries may look great dipped in chocolate, but their smaller cousins usually have much better flavor.



Store strawberries loosely packed without washing. Wash them quickly just before using to avoid their becoming water logged. Drain and pat dry with paper towels to remove excess moisture.

One quart of berries will yield about two cups of crushed berries for making jams.

Freezing Berries

Berries can be frozen with or without sugar. To freeze whole berries without sugar, wash, cap, and drain the berries. Spread them in a single layer on a baking sheet or jelly roll pan. Freeze them until they are frozen solid. Then transfer them to plastic freezer bags. (Look for plastic bags that are designed for freezing. They are thicker and more vapor proof.) Whole berries can also be vacuum packed.

To freeze whole, sliced, or crushed strawberries in sugar, add ¾ cup sugar to 1 quart strawberries. Stir until most of the sugar is dissolved or let stand for 15 minutes before putting into containers. Soft sliced berries will yield sufficient syrup for covering if the fruit is layered with sugar and allowed to stand 15 minutes.

Artificial sweeteners may be used but do not provide the beneficial effect of sugar such as color protection and thickness of syrup. Use manufacturer's directions to determine the amount of artificial sweetener to use.

Gingered Spring Jam

A touch of ginger intensifies the flavors of strawberry and rhubarb. Using some slightly under ripe berries adds some natural pectin to jam helping to provide a firmer set. Also choose some berries that are just ripe for a good flavor. This jam has a very soft set and is more firm if refrigerated.



2 quarts strawberries
1 pound rhubarb
2 ounces crystallized ginger*, minced
¼ cup lemon juice
1 package Ball 100% Natural Fruit Jell Pectin®
5½ cups sugar

Wash jars, bands, and lids. Crush strawberries and measure 4 cups. Finely chop rhubarb and measure 2½ cups. Combine strawberries, rhubarb, ginger, and lemon juice in a large saucepot. Stir in pectin. Bring mixture to a boil over high heat, stirring constantly. Add sugar. Return mixture to a rolling boil. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim foam if necessary. Wipe jar rim clean. Place lid on jar with sealing compound next to glass. Screw band down evenly and firmly just until a point of resistance is met—fingertip tight. Process 10 minutes in a boiling-water canner.

Yield: about 8 half-pints.

*Our taste testers at the office thought this had a strong ginger flavor. If you would like less bite, try it with less ginger.

Source: www.homecanning.com

The Pectin Mystery

Until recently, choosing pectin products was a simple matter of using a powdered form or liquid pectin. If you followed directions and measured accurately, you were pretty well assured success. When you see a recipe today calling for powdered pectin, it is helpful to note the brand and/or type of pectin. Two brands of regular powdered pectin differ in the type of acid (fumaric versus citric) used to assist with the gel. In turn the basic recipes differ slightly in the ingredients needed. For best results, use recipes tested by the manufacturer and included with the package. Low sugar and freezer jams require recipes designed for the specific product.

A Better Tool for the Job

Some people might call them gadgets, but these little tools make jobs safer, faster, or less messy.

1. A *plastic bubble freer* replaces a metal knife to remove air bubbles in the jar. As the metal knife touches the sides of the jar, it can scratch the glass creating miniature fractures that may break during processing. A thin plastic scrapper can be used safely but is wider than the bubble freer.
2. The *lid wand* has a magnetic end that lifts lids out of the hot water. It beats burnt fingers as you try to lift them with a knife, plus the knife can scratch the inside coating or sealing compound.
3. *Jar lifter*. This gadget has been around for awhile. The pinch type prongs close around the neck of each jar allowing you to place or remove a single jar in or from the canner at a time. It's better than the scalded fingers you get when using the tea towel method and is less strenuous than lifting a whole canner rack at once.
4. A *wide mouth funnel* for filling jars. The sides of the funnel direct small pieces of food, sauces, juice, or jellies into the jar with less spilling and therefore, less sticky to wipe off the jar and sealing edge before applying the lids.
5. A *nylon jelly bag and stand*. Great for straining juice. The nylon bag washes better than muslin and holds the food being drained better than cheesecloth. The stand beats tying a bag to a cabinet door to drain.
6. *Paper towels* to wipe off sealing edges. (Not exactly a gadget.) Try a wet paper towel to wipe food residue from the sealing edge of the jar. It's more sanitary because it can be thrown away—no more soap suds or bacteria in the jars from a dishcloth that wasn't clean. Besides, I never had enough dishcloths to get a clean one each time one was needed.
7. A *strawberry huller*. This little gadget removes the green stem quickly and easily. No slips of the knife.

What would you add to your “favorites” list?

Can You Pass the Test?

These were some questions posed to consumers at the Penn State Cooperative Extension exhibit at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show. How would you answer them?



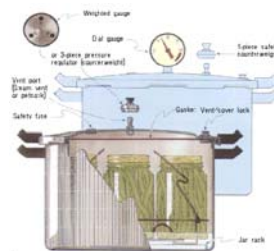
Look for the correct answers on pages 5-6.

1. Which jar has the proper headspace?
 - a. Green beans with ½ inch headspace
 - b. Peaches that touch the top of the jar
 - c. Chicken with 1 ¼ inch headspace
 - d. Jelly with ½ inch headspace
2. Which jar has been properly prepared for storage?
 - a. Jar is washed and ring has been removed
 - b. Jar is washed and ring has been replaced
 - c. Jar is labeled with contents, variety, date canned
 - d. A and C
 - e. B and C
3. Which of the following ingredients is important to the safety of canned tomato products?
 - a. Lemon Juice
 - b. Sugar
 - c. Salt
 - d. Onion
4. How high should water be in a boiling water bath canner?
 - a. ½ inch above the jar lids
 - b. 1 inch above the jar lids
 - c. Up to the neck of the jar
 - d. 3 inches in the bottom of the canner
5. How often should a pressure canner dial gauge be tested?
 - a. Every 10 years
 - b. Yearly
 - c. When it does not seem to be working properly
 - d. No need to test

Pressure Canning

Pressure Canner Check List

Before the canning season starts, take a look at your pressure canner and replace worn parts if needed.



- ✓ Is the canner in good condition free from scratches, pitting, cracks, and excess discoloration?
- ✓ Are the handles secured tightly with no loose, broken, or missing parts?
- ✓ Are the closing devices clean and in good condition?
- ✓ Are metal to metal surfaces clean and in good condition? If necessary, a very light coating of cooking oil may be applied to the underside of the body lugs to make closing and removal of the lid easier.
- ✓ Are gaskets firm and elastic—not brittle, dry, cracked or broken? Also, don't forget to check the little gasket on the cover lock.
- ✓ Is the gasket trough clean?
- ✓ Is the safety valve (also called the overpressure plug) firm and elastic?
- ✓ Is the petcock (vent pipe and pressure regulator) clean and does it work easily?
- ✓ Is the dial gauge (if you have one) free of rust, cracks, or moisture?
- ✓ Are the vent pipe and dial gauge securely attached with nut and metal washer?
- ✓ Does the dial gauge point to 0?
- ✓ Does the canner have its canning rack?

To clean your canner, wipe the cover with a soapy cloth and then wipe with a clean damp cloth. Clean the steam vent in the cover by drawing a string or pipe cleaner through it. Whiting powder used as a scouring powder will remove built-up grease. Take off removable petcocks and safety valves and wash and dry them thoroughly. Occasionally soak these parts in vinegar to remove mineral deposits before you put the canner away.

The darkened surface on the inside of an aluminum canner can be cleaned by filling it above the darkened line with a mixture of one tablespoon cream of tartar to each quart of water. Place the canner on the stove, bring the water to a boil, cover and boil until the dark deposits disappear. Then empty the canner and wash it with hot soapy water, rinse and dry.

These suggestions for storing the canner will help to keep it in good condition. Crumple newspaper inside the kettle to absorb moisture and odors. Wrap the lid in paper and invert on the kettle. Never store the canner with the lid sealed on the canner.

Additional Tips in Caring for Your Pressure Canner

Don't submerge the cover in water or let the dial gauge come in contact with any liquid. Avoid getting oil on the gasket (sealing ring). Remove and wash the gasket each time the canner is used. Make sure the gasket is dry before replacing it in the gasket trough. Replace the over pressure plug when you replace the sealing ring. Replace rings and pressure plug at least every 3 years. Take the make and model number of your pressure canner with you to the store when you shop for replacement parts.

Dial Gauge Testing

You may have your pressure canner dial gauge checked on Wednesdays between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. through August at the Lancaster County extension office. Residents of other counties should contact their extension office for times. Also, Martha will be available to answer questions on Wednesdays at 717-394-6851.

Questions

If I am only canning part of a canner load, do I need to use the full time and pressure to process the batch? Yes. The pressure, time, and liquid in the canner must be the same regardless of the number of jars being processed.

What are "Mason" jars?

These jars which are specifically designed for home canning are made of heat-tempered glass and are able to withstand the superheated steam of the pressure canner. They are durable and can be reused. They have a deep neck and a wide sealing surface to obtain a tight seal. Commercial jars such as mayonnaise jars are designed for one time use, may become scratched during home use weakening the glass that could break during processing. Never use jars designed for commercial canning in the pressure canner.

Why does my canner sometimes hold 11 pint jars and other times I can only get 9 jars to fit? The diameter of Mason jars varies from one manufacturer to another. How should jars be packed into the canner when placing more than one layer in the canner? Stagger the jars by placing one jar on top of two. A rack may be placed between the layers of jars.

Do any changes need to be made to use the pressure canner container as a boiling water bath?

Check that the height of the canner will allow the jars to be covered with at least one inch of water above the top of the jars with room for that water to boil rapidly. That means that 3 to 4 inches of space is needed above the top of the jars. Instead of using the tight fitting canner cover, use a baking sheet or other cover to hold the heat in.

Watch the Temperature

Temperature extremes can cause jars to crack. Cold jars should not be immersed in boiling water. It is recommended that jars be kept in 180°F. water until food is placed in them. Food and jars should be hot when placed in the canner. Jars that are raw packed and, therefore, somewhat cool, are placed in 140°F. water; jars that are hot packed may be placed in 180°F. water before processing.

Avoid drafts when removing jars from the canner. Contents in the jars may still be boiling. When jars are removed from the canner set them on a dry towel or a rack at room temperature. Don't set jars on a cold surface.

Answers to Can You Pass the Test

1-c, 2-d, 3-a, 4-b, 5-b

1-c. Poultry expands during processing and requires 1 ¼ inches of headspace; beef requires 1 inch headspace, low acid vegetables such as green beans require 1 inch, fruits and tomatoes require ½ inch, and most jellies require ¼ inch headspace.

2-d. Jars should be washed, the ring removed, and labeled before placing in a cool, dark place for storage. If the ring is left on a properly sealed jar, it may rust during storage causing the seal to break.

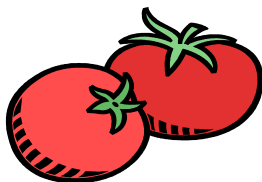
3-a. Tomatoes are borderline acidic. The addition of one tablespoon of bottled lemon juice or ½ teaspoon powdered ascorbic acid per pint (double the amounts for quarts) increases the acidity to safely process tomatoes in a boiling water bath. Sugar and salt are sometimes added for improved flavor. Adding onion to tomato products reduces their acidity increasing the need for pressure canner processing.

4-b. Jars need to be covered with 1 to 2 inches of water in order for the heat from the boiling water to evenly penetrate the jar killing harmful microorganisms.

5-b. Test the pressure canner dial gauge yearly. You can have it tested free at the Lancaster County Cooperative Extension Office on Wednesdays between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Only dial gauges need to be tested. You only need to bring the lid for testing.

Food Preservation Workshops

Included with this newsletter is a list of classes being offered this summer and fall. Plan now to attend one of these informative workshops. Learn new skills or pick up new tips for old skills.



Resources

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

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

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

National Presto Industries (information about pressure canning and manuals for canners)
<http://www.gopresto.com>

Mrs. Wages (recipes and canning information)
<http://www.mrswages.com>

Alltrista (Ball Canning—canning information and recipes) <http://homecanning.com>

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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