



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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September – October 2005

Dear Home Food Preserver,

It has been a season of contrasts. The garden started out with great promise as the leaf lettuce provided wonderful salads, the gypsy pepper produced an early abundance of red fruit, and the green beans were tender for canning and freezing. However, the dry weather took its toll on the zucchini, cucumbers, and late peppers. While we would usually be enjoying end of the season produce now, our gardens are at a stand still. Even with watering, we haven't been able to coax the turnips to come up. We've even noticed that the amount, quality, and variety of produce available at local farm markets are more limited than usual.

Nevertheless, the dry weather has produced some of the sweetest peaches and corn we have ever eaten. We anticipate the apples and pears will be equally good. We will be including several recipes using these fruits in the "Winter Potpourri" workshop. We've been testing recipes and meeting this week to mix our potpourri of gift ideas using home preserved products to share with you in November. Join us and bring a friend for this informative and fun workshop.

Sincerely,

Nancy R. Wiker

Nancy R. Wiker
Extension Educator – FCS
Penn State Cooperative Extension

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Featured Food of the Month – Cranberries

This salsa can be used as a dip or stirred into cream cheese just before use to make a tangy spread.

Spicy Cranberry Salsa

6 cups chopped red onion
4 finely chopped large Serrano peppers*
1 ½ cups water
1 ½ cups cider vinegar (5%)
1 tablespoon canning salt
1 1/3 cups sugar
¾ cup bottled lemon juice

6 tablespoons clover honey
12 cups (2 ¾ pounds) rinsed, fresh whole
cranberries

Yield: 6 pints

*Gloves should be worn when handling and cutting hot peppers or wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before touching your face or eyes.

Combine all ingredients, except cranberries, in a large Dutch oven. Bring to a boil over high heat; reduce heat slightly and boil gently for five minutes. Add cranberries, reduce heat slightly and simmer mixture for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching. Fill the hot mixture into clean, hot pint jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Leave saucepan over low heat while filling jars. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe rims of jars with damp paper towel and apply two-piece metal canning lids.

Process in a boiling water canner for 10 minutes (15 minutes if 1,000-6,000ft. altitude; 20 minutes if over 6,000ft.). Let cool, undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours and check seals.

(Source: *National Center for Home Food Preservation*)

Cranberry Season

As cranberries become available, it's a good idea to buy extra and freeze them. Choose firm, deep red berries with glossy skins. Stem and sort. Wash and drain. Remove as much moisture as possible. Blot dry with a clean towel. Pack cranberries into containers, leaving headspace or freeze them first on a tray and then pack them into containers as soon as they are frozen.

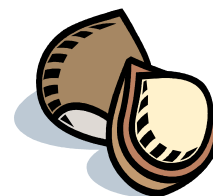
Cranberries can be dried for use in baked goods, granola, or as a snack. Sprinkling a few on desserts, in salads, or on cereal adds crunch. Removing moisture from the berry concentrates the flavor, but home dried cranberries will not have the texture or sweetness of the commercially dried variety. Pre-treat the cleaned berries by dipping them in boiling water to "crack" the skins. Avoid over exposure to the boiling water or you will have sauce. Dip quickly in cold water to stop the cooking process. Another method is to cut the raw berries in half. Cracking the skin or cutting the berries exposes the interior of the berry to air for quicker

drying. If cranberries are dried without breaking the skin, they remain very puffy, lightweight and take an extremely long time to dry. Dry the berries at 140°F until they are shriveled and light in weight with no sign of moisture. It takes 24 to 36 hours to reach this stage in a dehydrator.

Canned cranberry sauce can be made by cooking 4 cups of berries in one cup of water until soft and pressing through a fine sieve. Add 2 cups of sugar and boil 3 minutes before pouring the boiling hot sauce into hot jars leaving ½ inch headspace. Process pints or quarts in a boiling water bath for 15 minutes. (One quart of cranberries makes about 2 pint jars of sauce.)

Nuts about Nuts

Are you lucky enough to have some nut trees on your property to provide an abundant supply of the tasty little morsels for cooking and snacking? Such trees often provide varieties not readily available in the grocery store—black walnuts, hickory nuts, shellbarks, chestnuts. Whether you grow your own nuts or buy them from the store, some tips may be helpful in storing them.



The shells protect the nutmeats against staleness. Look for nuts with clean shells without cracks. Because of their high fat content, nuts can turn rancid quickly. Oxygen in the air and high temperatures hasten rancidity. Nuts keep well up to a month in the pantry. For longer storage, shelled nuts can be kept fresh for several months in tightly covered containers in the refrigerator. Glass and tightly sealed plastic containers are good. Fill the containers so as to exclude as much air as possible. Whole nutmeats keep better than smaller pieces because less surface area is exposed to the air. Shelled or unshelled nuts can be kept in the freezer if stored in moisture and vapor-proof containers. Freezing the nuts will also kill any "critters". High temperatures and added fats and salt hasten rancidity. Therefore, it is best to wait until just before using the nutmeats to heat them or to add butter, oil, or salt.

Flavored Vinegars



Flavored vinegars add elegance and interest to entrées and salads. They also work well as a hostess gift. While they are easy to make, use caution to produce a safe product. Use glass containers that have been sterilized ten minutes in boiling water. Scald lids and caps. If using cork, use new pre-sterilized corks. Use high quality herbs. Wash gently and blot dry on paper towels. Herbs can be dipped in a sanitizing solution of 1 teaspoon household chlorine bleach in 6 cups water, then rinsed and patted dry. If you choose to use wine or rice vinegar as a base, keep it refrigerated and use it quickly because these vinegars contain some protein that provides an excellent medium for bacterial growth.

Herbal vinegars: Use 3 to 4 sprigs per pint of vinegar. Dried herbs may be substituted if necessary; use 3 tablespoons dried herbs per pint of vinegar.

Fruit vinegars: Raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, peaches, pears and the peel of lemons and oranges are favorites for flavoring vinegars. Sometimes they are combined with herbs or spices such as mint or cinnamon. Thoroughly wash all fruits with clean water; peel, if necessary, before use. Berries may be left whole or halved. Larger fruits, such as peaches, may need to be sliced or cubed. Allow 1 to 2 cups of fruit per pint of vinegar or the peel of one orange or lemon per pint of vinegar. Fruit may be crushed or “bruised” to assist in flavor development.

Heat the vinegar to just below the boiling point, or at least to 190-195°F, and pour over the flavoring ingredients in jars leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe and attach lids. Let sit in a cool, dark place undisturbed for 3 to 4 weeks to develop flavors—it takes at least 10 days for most flavors to develop and about 3 or 4 weeks for the greatest flavor to be extracted. Strain the vinegar until clear. Discard the fruit and/or herbs. Pour the strained vinegar into clean sterilized jars and cap tightly. A few clean berries or a washed and sanitized sprig of fresh herb may be added to the jars before closing,

if desired.

Store flavored vinegar in the refrigerator for best retention of flavor and freshness. Vinegar should keep for up to three months in cool storage and up to six to eight months in the refrigerator. If mold, bubbling, cloudiness, or sliminess develops, throw it away without using or tasting.

Clear or softly colored vinegars displayed in a pretty decanter with a sprig of herbs makes a lovely window decoration—but should be just that. Vinegars displayed on the windowsill or shelf for more than a few weeks should be considered a permanent decoration and not used in foods.

Freezing Broccoli

Broccoli is one of the vegetables that can be blanched in steam with good results. Broccoli flowerets 1 1/2 inches across should be blanched 5 minutes. To steam, use a pot with a tight lid and a basket that holds the food at least three inches above the bottom of the pot. Put an inch or two of water in the pot and bring the water to a boil.



Put the broccoli in the basket in a single layer so that steam reaches all parts quickly. Cover the pot and keep the heat high. Start counting the steaming time as soon as the lid is on.

Broccoli can also be water blanched for 3 minutes. Start counting water blanching time after the water returns to a boil.

Chill blanched broccoli quickly in cold water before draining and packaging.

Hidden Colors

Most color changes in food do not make the food unsafe. However, you may have wondered why they occur. Colors in food are sensitive to acids in lemon and other fruit juices, anti-caking ingredients in table salt, heat, light, and minerals in water, and metals from cooking utensils.

Some specific examples follow:

Yellow Cauliflower: White vegetables like cauliflower are white in acid but yellow in alkaline solutions. Minerals in water may have caused the water to be more alkaline than normal. **Pink Pears:** The light colored pigments in the pears change to pink either from over processing or from naturally occurring enzymes. **White or pink crystals in grape jelly:** Grapes are high in tartaric acid that goes into solution during cooking but precipitates as crystals during cooling. Prevent crystal formation by extracting grape juice, cooling overnight in the refrigerator, and filtering juice before canning or making jelly.

(Source: Susan Brewer, Univ. of Illinois)

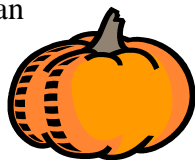
Pumpkin 'N Spice 'N Everything Nice

“No” to Canning Purée

It would be nice to be able to can puréed pumpkin seasoned to perfection for the time honored Thanksgiving pie. Stop! Don't can puréed pumpkin or any other pumpkin such as pumpkin butter. When pumpkin is puréed, the density of the product prevents adequate heat transfer to the center of the jar allowing harmful bacteria to survive. Even in a pressure canner, it is not safe to can puréed pumpkin. There are recommendations for canning cubed pumpkin and squash where the cubes are surrounded by water that can carry the heat to the center of the jar.

To can pumpkin cubes, cut into 1-inch cubes and add to boiling water and boil for 2 minutes; pack the hot cubes into hot jars; fill the jars with boiling hot cooking liquid. Allow 1-inch headspace for both pumpkin and liquid. Process at 11 pounds pressure in a dial gauge pressure canner or at 10 pounds pressure in a weighted gauge pressure canner. Process pints for 55 minutes and quarts for 90 minutes.

I've been asked why it is safe to can apple butter but not pumpkin butter. Apples are a high acid food and the natural acidity of the apples retards the growth of bacteria. Pumpkin is a low acid food that more easily supports bacterial growth.



About Squash

Most winter squash can be canned or frozen following the directions for pumpkin. Because its flesh does not stay cubed on heating, spaghetti squash should be frozen instead of canned.



Recommendations for canning summer squash and zucchini have been withdrawn. Slices or cubes of cooked summer squash will get quite soft and pack tightly into the jars affecting the heat penetration.

“Yes” to Freezing

It is safe to freeze puréed pumpkin and winter squash. The quality of the product is good to use in pies, desserts, and as a vegetable. Freezing pumpkin purée in good quality zipper type freezer bags allows the product to be stacked easily in the freezer. Use a funnel to fill the purée into the bag keeping food off the sealing edge. Use your hand to press all the excess air out of the bag and seal. Freeze flat and then stack the frozen packages. Flat packages thaw more quickly than denser packages. Remember to thaw the purée in a refrigerator or in the microwave oven. If microwave thawing, remove from the freezer bag. Thawed pumpkin can be removed without mess from the freezer bag by clipping a corner on the bag and pressing it out like a pastry tube.

Baked Pumpkin Casserole

Use your frozen pumpkin or winter squash to prepare this tasty and appealing side dish. It is a favorite vegetable at Zepp family gatherings. We use butternut squash instead of pumpkin. For variety, instead of cinnamon, add a tablespoon of frozen orange juice concentrate. Children would like more marshmallows on top.

2 cups mashed or pureed pumpkin
2 tablespoons brown sugar
½ cup crushed pineapple, drained
1 teaspoon melted butter
dash salt, optional
¼ teaspoon cinnamon, optional
½ cup miniature marshmallows

Combine mashed pumpkin, brown sugar, pineapple, butter, salt, and cinnamon. Put in a one-quart casserole. Sprinkle with marshmallows. Bake at 350°F until bubbly and hot—about 25 minutes. (If you start with cold pumpkin, bake the mixture 15 minutes before adding the marshmallows and increase the baking time.) Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Applesauce

Quick Work with Applesauce

1. Mix varieties for great flavor.
2. Make chunky style sauce and skip the pressing step
3. Stir a plastic bubble freer through the jarred sauce to remove air bubbles.
4. Thinner sauce is less likely to siphon
5. Sauce should be hot when filling jars
6. Process pints in the boiling water bath for 15 minutes, quarts for 20 minutes.
7. Don't can it—chill the sauce and freeze it.

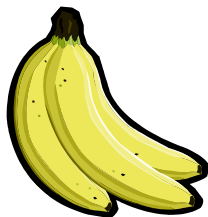


Try these toppers to give applesauce some pizzazz!

Crushed gingersnaps or graham crackers—add just before serving so they don't get soggy.
Red cinnamon candies
Raisins or Craisins® (dried cranberries)
Raspberry or rhubarb jam
Granola
Toasted coconut
Chopped nuts—even better if toasted

Long Live the Banana

It's okay to store bananas in the refrigerator—once they have ripened. Cold interferes with the ripening process, and bringing refrigerated bananas back to room temperature will not reverse the process. However, once bananas have reached the desired degree of ripeness at room temperature, they can be kept in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. The outside will turn



brown, but they will still be light-colored on the inside.

Once cut, bananas darken quickly unless sprinkled with citrus juice (try orange juice) or a mixture of citric acid and water.

Very ripe bananas can be peeled, cut into chunks, wrapped in plastic and frozen to be used later for smoothies, or defrosted and mashed for baking or making fruit sauces.

Canning without Sugar--Splenda®

Until recently, recipes for canning pickles and jams without sugar were limited. When sugar is important to the texture of the product, sugar substitutions are not recommended.

With regular pectin, sugar is essential in the chemical balance needed to obtain a gel. However, sucralose (trade named Splenda®) and saccharin can be used as the optional sweetener in a jam or jelly made with no-sugar needed pectin, such as Mrs. Wages Light Home Jell® Fruit Pectin, Sure Jell® for Less or No-Sugar Needed Recipes, or Ball® No-Sugar Needed Pectin. These are low-methoxyl pectins which do not require sugar at all.

The manufacturer of Splenda® has teamed up with the maker of SureJell® to develop no-sugar needed recipes for peach, strawberry, and triple berry jam. These are cooked jams that can be canned and stored at room temperature. These recipes are available at www.splenda.com or www.kraftfood.com/surejell/. The National Center for Home Food Preservation has modified its no-sugar jelly recipes to use sucralose instead of liquid sweetener (saccharin.) These recipes are refrigerated jellies thickened with unflavored gelatin.

The National Center for Home Food Preservation has also developed three recipes using Splenda® for quick pickled sweet cucumber slices, pickled beets, and pickled cantaloupe. Recipes are available at www.uga.edu/nchfp/publications/nchfp/factsheet_s.html. If you do not have access to the web, call the extension office and request copies.

Under the Lid

Mold: Mold growth in foods can raise the pH of the food. In home canned products, this could mean that the high acid products could become low acid and therefore run the risk of botulism or other bacterial spoilage. Thus, any home canned product that shows signs of mold growth should be discarded.

The high sugar content of regular jellied products would prevent the growth of *Clostridium botulinum*. However, moldy jams and jellies should also be discarded because the mold could be producing a mycotoxin that could make you sick.

Yeast: The sugar in fruit is a natural source of food for yeast to grow. This can occur if the fruit is improperly processed and sealed, or in the case of jellied products if the sugar content is low. Fermented fruit products have a disagreeable taste and should be discarded.

Discolored lids: The undersides of metal lids sometimes discolor from the natural compounds in some foods--particularly acids. These compounds corrode the metal and make a dark deposit on the underside of the lid. This deposit on lids of sealed, properly processed canned foods is harmless.

Workshops

Fall 2005

Sauerkraut: Monday, October 24, 2005
7:00-8:30 p.m.

Have you ever wondered what causes cabbage to turn into sauerkraut? Learn the secrets for making your own sauerkraut from Debbie Hartman (Lebanon County Master Gardener).



Winter Potpourri: Tuesday, November 8, 2005

10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon or
7:00-9:00 p.m.



Look for lots of ideas to make for family and friends. This will be a potpourri of foods and packaging ideas featuring winter specialties: lemons, oranges, jimaca,

kiwi, and cranberries plus updates of pickles, relishes, pie fillings, jams and jellies.

What's New for 2006

Smart Choices—Controlling What's in the Jar

Thursday, March 30, 2006

10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon or 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Apply the new dietary guidelines to home food preservation by controlling what goes into the jar or freezer. Look for ways to reduce fat, sugar, and salt and to increase calcium in home preserved foods.

Creating a "Berry" Good Time.

Thursday, May 25, 2006

10:00 a.m.-12:00 noon or 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Here are some ideas for preserving and using the ever popular strawberry, blueberries, and raspberries.



All classes will be held at the Farm and Home Center. There is a \$7.50 charge for each class. Call the office to register.

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.

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