



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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May – June 2007

Dear Home Food Preserver,

Welcome back to a new year of food preserving. Our gardens are planted as we look forward to a good harvest of beans, cucumbers, onions, carrots, and peppers—sounds like a good combination for chow-chow in September. Meanwhile we are in the midst of enjoying more seasonal produce such as leaf lettuce, strawberries, and rhubarb. Perhaps you have some extra berries to freeze or to make into jam. The fresh taste of this month's featured recipe is sure to be a hit with warm rolls at holiday meals.

Hopefully, as you are getting ready for a new canning season, those of you who use a dial gauge pressure canner are making plans to have the gauge tested for accuracy. We offer this test free at the extension office and this summer will be testing gauges at six locations across the county. See the schedule on page 5.

If you enter canned goods in fair competition, you may find some new regulations this year as described on page 5.

Also, included with this newsletter is a schedule of workshops we will be offering this year. Learn a new skill or brush up on old ones. Happy Preserving!

Nancy R. Wiker

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

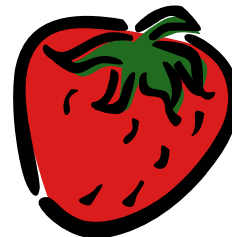
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What's Inside....

Food of the Month: Berries

- Strawberry Freezer Jam
- Strawberry Time
- Picking Your Own Strawberries
- Strawberry Trivia
- Bramble Berries
- Blueberries



Rhubarb

Success with Freezing

- Freezing Reminders
- Headspace for Frozen Food
- Freezing in Jars

The Overnight Dilemma

Red: Good and Healthy

Canning Highlights

- Check Before You Begin
- New Fair Competition Guidelines
- Bringing Dial Gauge Testing To You

Resources

Food of the Month – Berries

Strawberry Freezer Jam

The fresh flavor of the uncooked berries in this jam has made it a family favorite for years. Manufacturers of both liquid and powdered pectins include no-cook jams in their recipe leaflets. This version made with liquid pectin requires no cooking at all.

- 1 ¾ cups crushed strawberries (about 1 quart whole berries)
- 4 cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 pouch (3 oz.) liquid pectin

Measure 1 ¾ cups crushed strawberries. Place in an extra large bowl. Add sugar, mix well and let stand for 10 minutes.

Measure lemon juice into a small bowl. Add liquid pectin and stir well. Stir into fruit and continue stirring for 3 minutes.

Pour jam into freezer containers or canning jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Cover container. Let stand at room temperature until set (up to 24 hours). Freeze or refrigerate.

Makes about 4 half-pint jars.

Source: So Easy to Preserve

Tips for Successful Jam

For best flavor and set, choose firm, ripe berries. Over-ripe berries will yield a soft set and berries that are still white inside will make a very firm set.

Crush berries one layer at a time—a potato masher works well. Avoid pureeing berries if using a food processor. Jam should have small pieces of fruit in it.

Measure ingredients exactly.

Level sugar in dry measuring cups with a straight edge spatula or knife. Too much sugar results in excess firmness and too little sugar results in a soft set. Never use a sugar substitute unless you are using special pectins for less or no sugar needed recipes.

Strawberry Time

Enjoy strawberries year 'round—especially if you freeze them.

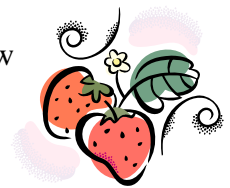
Select firm, fully ripe (red) berries. Unripe berries will not ripen after being picked. Small berries are often the most flavorful. One quart of berries weighs about 1¼ pounds and makes about 4 servings of berries. Berries will mold quickly at room temperature and can be refrigerated for only a few days. Don't wash berries until you are ready to use them.

If you have extra berries, just wash them, cap them, and pack them into a freezer bag or vacuum seal them. To keep berries separate, freeze the berries in a single layer on a tray or cookie sheet before packing. Frozen unsweetened berries can be used to make jams and jellies.

Berries can be sweetened and frozen in syrup or dry sugar. For **whole berries in syrup**, put the berries into containers and cover with cold 50% syrup (equal parts sugar and water) leaving appropriate headspace (1/2 inch per pint) for expansion. For **whole, sliced, or crushed berries in a sugar pack**, add ¾ cup sugar to 1 quart strawberries and mix thoroughly. Stir until most of the sugar is dissolved or let stand for 15 minutes to draw liquid. Put into containers, leaving headspace. Besides flavoring the berries, sugar helps to maintain the color and texture of the berries.

Picking Your Own Strawberries

Don't heap berries into your picking containers—use shallow containers. Overfilling containers or packing berries down will bruise the lower berries.



Pick berries early in the morning or on cool, cloudy days to avoid the heat of the day. Heat makes berries soft and easy to bruise.

Keep picked berries out of the sunshine. Place them in the shade of a tree or shed instead of the car trunk or on a car seat while you finish picking.

Cool berries as soon as possible after picking. Remove defective berries (rot, sunburn, insect injury) from the plants and place them between the rows behind you.

Defective berries left in the plants will quickly spread to other berries.

Reference: www.pickyourown.org

Strawberry Trivia

There is a legend that strawberries were named in the 19th century by English children who picked the berries and strung them on grass straws and sold them as “straws of berries.” Native American Indians called strawberries “heart-seed berries” and pounded them into their traditional corn-meal bread. Colonists created their own version of the Native American’s bread by creating strawberry shortcake.

On the average, there are 200 tiny seeds in every strawberry.

Source: California Strawberry Commission

Bramble Berries

Bramble berries include those with an aggregate fruit cluster of many individual sections each containing one seed. Two favorites are raspberries and blackberries. When picked, raspberries detach from the center core so the fruit has a cupped shaped cavity. Blackberries detach from the plant with the center still in the fruit and it is part of what is eaten. Because of their lack of a central core, raspberries are more delicate and more easily crushed than blackberries.

Like strawberries, raspberries and blackberries can be individually quick frozen on a tray or just washed and put into a freezer bag dry. They can also be mixed with sugar or syrup. Because of their delicate texture, stir gently to avoid crushing. Use the same proportion of dry sugar to fruit as for strawberries. If choosing a syrup pack, you might want to reduce the syrup concentration for blackberries depending upon the sweetness of the berries. A 40% (2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar to 4 cups water) syrup is suggested for freezing raspberries. The high moisture content of bramble berries will cause cell walls to break down when frozen resulting in a juicy product. Because of this, some people prefer to use frozen bramble berries in cobblers instead of pies.

Blueberries



Select top quality blueberries.

Look for blueberries with a white, powdery bloom. It's a natural food starch that protects the berry and helps the blueberry stay fresh longer.

Blueberries don't ripen after they've been removed from the vine. Choose berries that are deep blue-gray without any hint of red. Wrinkled or shriveled skin indicates old berries that have begun to deteriorate. Shake the container gently to check that the berries move freely—if they don't, they might be mushy or moldy.

For immediate use, store in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to a week. Wash before using. For long term storage, freeze whole (washing before using) or wash,

and dry thoroughly between towels before freezing. It is ideal to freeze berries on a tray before packing into bags or boxes. This allows you to easily remove the amount you want at one time.

Fresh or frozen blueberries can be used to make jams, syrups, or pie fillings.

Rhubarb

The best rhubarb has firm, crisp, tender, well-colored stalks with few fibers. The deeper the red, the more flavorful the stalk will be. Use only the stalks—the leaves are poisonous.

Blanching rhubarb in boiling water for 1 minute and cooling it promptly in cold water helps retain its color and flavor. Caution: don't over blanch or you will have a watery mess. Rhubarb may be cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to 1 inch pieces or into lengths to fit the package. It can be frozen sweetened or unsweetened. To freeze without sugar, simply pack raw or blanched rhubarb tightly into containers without sugar allowing $\frac{1}{2}$ inch headspace with wide top openings. It can also be frozen by the tray method and frozen in freezer bags. Unsweetened rhubarb is best used within 6 months. If preferred, the rhubarb can be covered and frozen with syrup made of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sugar and 4 cups water.

Cooked, sweetened rhubarb sauce freezes well and is ready to use when thawed. If you wish to thicken a sauce for freezing, use tapioca, cooked instant Clear Jel®, or ThermFlo®. Avoid cornstarch or flour thickeners as they tend to separate when frozen.

With frozen rhubarb in the freezer, you can enjoy this tart fruit in pies, cakes, cobblers, and crisps when there is not a sign of the plant in the garden and the roots are buried under the snow.

Rhubarb by itself or with other fruits makes delicious jams and jellies. Although the flavor holds up well, they are best used within a few months because rhubarb jams lose color as they set in storage.

Success with Freezing

Freezing Reminders

Check that the freezer is set at 0°F or below. It is OK to set the temperature control to -10°F about 24 hours in advance of major freezing to hasten freezing.

Freeze foods as soon as they are packed and sealed.

Add only 2 to 3 pounds of food per cubic foot of storage space. Overloading slows down the freezing rate which increases the size of ice crystals and lowers quality.

Place food in the coldest part of the freezer. Allow space between packages so air can circulate between them. After the food is frozen, packages can be stacked close together.

Headspace for Frozen Food—

Liquids expand when frozen—think how an ice cube is peaked in the center. When the liquid in a container of fruit freezes, it expands in the same manner. Foods packed in a liquid or syrup have the potential of swelling up and flowing over the edge of the container making a sticky mess in the freezer. General guidelines are to allow ½ inch headspace in wide top pint containers. Fruit packed in sugar or syrup in wide mouth quart containers should have 1 inch headspace. Those packed in narrow top containers should have ¾ inch headspace for pints and 1 ½ inches for quarts.

Freezing in Jars

Jars specially designed for freezing are made to withstand the temperature extremes in the freezer. Don't use peanut butter or mayonnaise jars. They were not made for freezing and may break when frozen. Also, make sure to leave adequate space at the top of the jar because when food freezes, it will expand and rise to the top. Without enough space, the expanded food may cause the jar to break. Wide mouth freezer jars are a good choice because the frozen food can slip out of the jar more easily.

More freezing tips:

Slide foil covered food inside a plastic bag to keep the foil from tearing and exposing the food. When freezing in an open casserole dish or pan, cover it with a large freezer bag. This protects the casserole and prevents the food from drying out. Heavy duty aluminum foil is more vapor-proof than regular foil.

The Overnight Dilemma

Can you safely reheat food that was forgotten on the counter overnight or was left out all day?

No. Two hours is the maximum time perishable foods should be at room temperature. This includes the total time

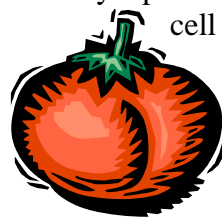


foods are out of the refrigerator—so if they are out an hour one day, and an hour the next day, that's it. While it is true that most bacteria are killed at boiling temperatures, the problem is that some bacteria such as *staphylococcus aureus* (staph) can form a heat-resistant toxin that cooking can't destroy. Just one bacterium, doubling every 20 minutes, can grow to over 2 million bacteria in 7 hours.

Red: Good and Healthy

Red fruits and vegetables contain many health-promoting phytochemicals including lycopene and anthocyanins. These include strawberries, cherries, cranberries, red grapes, pink/red grapefruit, raspberries, watermelon, beets, red cabbage, red peppers, radishes, red onions, rhubarb, and tomatoes. Most of these are suitable for canning or freezing.

Processed tomato products are the best source of lycopene because heating breaks down the cell structure releasing the lycopene making it more easily absorbed.



Because lycopene is fat-soluble, adding a little oil to the diet will improve its absorption by the body.

1 cup Product	Lycopene
Chopped fresh tomatoes	4 mg
Canned tomatoes	10 mg
Tomato juice	22 mg
Tomato sauce	37 mg
Ketchup	40 mg
Tomato paste	76 mg

(Source: www.oznet.ksu.edu/humannutrition/spotlight)

Canning Highlights

Check Before You Begin

Getting organized before starting a canning project prevents frustration, accidents, and promotes safety.

Inspect all jars to see that they are free of cracks or nicks in the rims. A tiny nick can prevent a jar from sealing. Also check that you have enough jars for the task at hand. With jams and jellies, it's a good idea to have a few extra because some recipes do yield more jars than listed.

Check that you have enough two piece lids. Check that the lids are new and that screw bands are rust free. Rusty lids risk sealing problems.

Use completely clean equipment.

If you are pressure canning, check that the gauge on your pressure canner is functioning properly. If the dial type, have the local extension office test it yearly. (See schedule included on this page.)

Wash and rinse jars thoroughly. Set jars in clean, hot water until used. If using the dishwasher, keep jars warm in the dishwasher until ready to use them. That avoids temperature extremes when hot food is added to the jar.

Use top quality produce. Cut out any blemishes, discolored or dark spots. Wash and rinse produce—remove all those surface spoilage agents before they get into the jar.

Plan work space to have enough room to work. Crowding can cause accidents.

New Fair Competition Guidelines

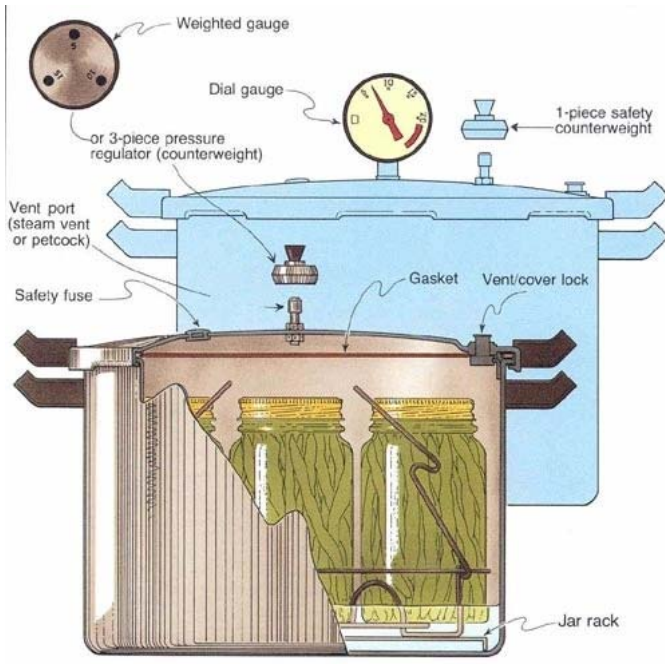
Those of you who enter canned good in county fairs may find some changes in competition guidelines this fall. At a meeting this spring, fair coordinators and fair judges made some recommendations to improve the safety of fair entries. Some categories may be changed and labels may be required to include the name of the food, date the food was processed, the method of processing used, and the length of time the food was processed. A Flyer “Preserving Foods for County Fairs” is available from the extension office. If interested, call for a copy.



Bringing Dial Gauge Testing To You

Dial gauge pressure canners need to be checked for accuracy each year. The test is free and only takes a few minutes. Only the lid is needed for testing. Weighted gauge canners do not need to be tested. In addition to testing gauges on most Wednesdays from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm here at the Cooperative Extension Office, we will be testing dial gauges on the following dates and locations.

Date	Time	Store	Location
June 8	12:00-2:00 pm	Weaver's Store	Fivepointville
June 12	12:00-4:00 pm	Oregon Dairy	Oregon Pike, Lititz
June 21	1:00-3:00 pm	Good's Store	Schaefferstown
June 21	6:00-8:00 pm	Good's Store	Ephrata
June 22	6:00-8:00 pm	Good's Store	East Earl
June 23	9:00-11:00 am	Good's Store	Quarryville
July 10	10:00am-12:00	Stauffer's of Kissel Hill	Lititz Store



Resources

So Easy to Preserve, 5th edition
 University of Georgia. The latest edition of this basic food preservation book came out last fall. It can be ordered directly from www.uga.edu/nchfp or can be purchased from the Lancaster County Cooperative Extension office.

Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving, edited by Judi Kingry and Lauren Devine, c. 2006. Jarden Corporation (makers of Ball and Bernadin products). This is a much larger and extensive book than the traditional Ball Blue Book. Available in book stores.

Let's Preserve is a free series of 13 flyers on canning and freezing a variety of fruits and vegetables available from your local cooperative extension office. They are also available from the Penn State Home Preservation website <http://foodsafety.psu.edu/preserve.html>

DVD *So Easy to Preserve*. Shows step-by-step procedures for boiling water bath and pressure canning, freezing, and drying. You may borrow a copy from us for a week. Good for beginners and as a review of safe practices.

Web Resources:

National Center for Home Food Preservation www.uga.edu/nchfp This includes food preservation procedures for anything that has been USDA tested. It also links the user to all the cooperative extension sites in each state.

California Strawberry Commission www.calstrawberry.com Includes recipes using both fresh and frozen strawberries.

The North American Bramble Growers Association www.raspberryblackberry.org This website includes information on growing and using raspberries and blackberries and includes a nice recipe section.

Rhubarb Information www.rhubarbinfo.com/
 This website includes everything you could want to know about rhubarb.

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