



# Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Home Food Preserver,

Preserving activities begin to slow down in October. Many jars of fruit, jams, pickles, and relishes pack our shelves and most of the vegetables are frozen. The-end-of-the-season produce still beckons for such specialties as chow-chow and pepper relish.

The abundance of winter squash and pumpkin this time of the year sends us to our recipe books. We are sharing one of those recipes with you as this month's feature food. Another recipe featuring dried apples added to pumpkin muffins will be available for tasting at our next workshop.

The wide variety of fresh apples available at this time of year provides lots of tasty dishes. Neighbors have even gotten to enjoy some of our apple desserts. Apple crisps, tortes and pies work well for freezing, too. Drying apples provides fragrance as they dehydrate. Dusting them with ground cinnamon before dehydrating sends a wonderful fragrance throughout the house as well as making a special taste treat.

As the calendar brings us closer to the holidays, we are thinking of the products we want to include in gift baskets. Each year we enjoy giving jams, jellies, and relishes to friends and family. We will be sharing ideas for gift giving with you at the "Gifts from the Kitchen Using Home Preserved Foods" Workshop on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Hopefully, you are enjoying this season of the year as much as we are.

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## Food of the Month – Butternut Squash

### Butternut Squash Soup

*The apple juice combined with the natural sugars in the squash produces a surprisingly sweet soup when combined with a generous measure of fresh ginger root. The recipe directions make a soup concentrate that saves space in the freezer. Finely minced fresh ginger makes the soup special, but you could use 1/2 teaspoon powdered ginger if the fresh is not available.*

2 large butternut squash (about 2 pounds each)  
 2 tablespoons olive oil  
 2 large carrots, peeled and thinly sliced  
 2 medium onions, chopped  
 1 clove garlic, chopped (optional)  
 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger  
 2 teaspoons curry powder (optional)  
 ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
 3 cups apple juice—divided

Bake or steam the butternut squash as directed in the article that follows. Discard seeds and spoon out the flesh of the squash and place it in the bowl of a food processor.

(You can also puree the mixture in a blender but will need to do 1/3 of the recipe at a time.)



Heat the oil in a heavy saucepan. Saute the carrots, onion, and garlic until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the ginger, curry, cinnamon, and nutmeg and continue cooking until the spices are evenly distributed. (If the carrots are not tender, add ½ cup apple juice after they have sautéed 5 minutes, cover, and cook gently until carrots are fork tender.)

Add this mixture to the squash in the food processor. Add 1 cup of the apple juice and process until smooth.

Ladle the soup into 2 quart or 4 pint containers. Cool, chill, label, and freeze for up to 2 months.

To use, thaw the soup overnight in the refrigerator, then add 1 cup of the remaining apple juice to each quart container. (The amount of apple juice will depend upon the liquid retained by the squash after it is cooked. If the squash is very dry, you may want to add additional apple juice.)

(Makes 2 quarts or 4 pints.)

If desired, milk may be substituted for the apple juice in the recipe. Milk will make a creamier soup.

The amount and type of spices is optional.

## Cooking Butternut Squash

Butternut squash, one of the members of the winter squash family, has a bright

yellow-orange flesh that is rich in nutrients including beta-carotene. It also provides potassium and has smaller amounts of calcium and vitamin C.

There are several ways to cook butternut squash. *Method 1:* The washed squash can be pierced several times with a knife and baked whole in a 350°F oven for about 45 minutes. Allow to cool several minutes before cutting and removing seeds. *Method 2:* Cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds and stringy pulp, place cut side down in a baking dish (you may add ¼ inch of water), and cover with aluminum foil; bake in a 325°F oven for one hour or more. *Method 3:* To cook in a microwave oven, pierce the squash several times with a knife or skewer. Then cook on full power 6 to 7 minutes. Turn squash over and rotate before cooking for another 6 to 7 minutes. Test for doneness by pushing on the rind with a potholder. Squash is done when it “gives” slightly. Remove from the oven and let stand 10 minutes or until cool enough to handle. Cut open and remove strings and seeds. *Method 4:* You can cut the squash into chunks and boil or steam them until fork tender.

I like to peel them before boiling or steaming them, but some people leave the skins on before cooking and remove them just before use. Scoop the pulp into a clean bowl. You can run the pulp through a ricer, food processor or blender for a smoother texture.

Reference: Mary Ann Oyler, Franklin County Cooperative Extension

## Freezing Squash and Pumpkin

Cooked squash or pumpkin can easily be frozen for later use. Place in freezer proof containers allowing enough headspace for expansion. It is not safe to can pumpkin and squash sauce or puree.

## Flavored with Ginger

The Butternut Squash Soup Recipe is flavored with fresh ginger. What do you know about the fresh form of ginger? The thick knobby light brown skin of the fresh ginger root (actually a rhizome) doesn’t give any indication of the zest it provides in cooked

dishes. The moist pale gold flesh has a slightly pungent, almost hot flavor. Fresh ginger root is found in the produce section of the grocery store. Choose rhizomes that are extremely hard and snap easily into pieces. Avoid dry, shriveled pieces that are light for their size. Examine the rhizomes for mold.

Fresh ginger will keep in the refrigerator crisper for two to three weeks if wrapped in a plastic bag with a paper towel to absorb moisture. You can freeze fresh ginger for long term storage. It is not necessary to defrost it. Also, frozen ginger is easy to peel and grate.

Several methods exist for peeling ginger. Peel it with a knife or vegetable peeler or scrape it with a teaspoon over the edge of the root.

If you only need the ginger flavor without any texture, you can extract the juice from a small piece of the ginger root by putting it through a garlic press.

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## Freezing Ideas

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### Easy Freezing

Those zip type freezer bags provide convenience for freezing solid vegetables and also work well for sauces like apple or pumpkin. Some seal tightly enough to hold soups and stews. Make freezing these soft-sided bags easy by placing the filled freezer bags in a single layer on a flat surface such as a baking sheet before putting in the freezer. Do not stack freezer bags until frozen so they will freeze faster. After they are frozen solid, you can remove them from the baking sheet and stack them directly on the freezer shelf. They can even be stored vertically.

### Steam-in-Plastic Bags

There have been several brands of plastic bags introduced to the retail market this year that are suitable for cooking fresh vegetables directly in the microwave oven. When directions are followed, they produce a good product. These are made with a food grade plastic able to withstand high temperatures and pressure without leaching plastic into the food. A similar product has been introduced by a

commercial frozen food manufacturer that allows you to cook their vegetable in the bag in which it is purchased.

Now, don't try to copy this product by designing your own freeze and cook bags. Regular plastic bags, even those labeled freezer bags, are not designed to cook in the microwave oven. Doing so could result in burns, food contamination, or even a bag exploding. Always follow the manufacturer's directions for using a product.

### Leftover Onion



You're cooking with a fresh onion but only need a portion of it. Until you get around to using the remaining portion it has spoiled. Solution-- after washing and peeling the raw onion, chop it into approximately ½ inch pieces. Toss into a freezer bag or a glass freezer jar and freeze. Remove air from freezer bag. If there is empty space in the jar, cover the onion with plastic wrap. (Wrapping the freezer bag with foil helps to reduce odor transfer to other foods in the freezer.) Frozen onion can be used in cooked products such as soups, ground meat mixtures, and casseroles. There is no need to thaw the onions for most uses. They will keep for three to six months in the freezer. Use this method for mature onions only.

### Freezing Peppers

If we haven't had a frost by the time you receive this newsletter, some of you may still be enjoying a great harvest of peppers. Both sweet peppers and hot peppers can be frozen. Thawed raw peppers retain some crispness and can be used in both cooked dishes or raw in uncooked dishes. To freeze bell or sweet peppers, wash, cut out stems, remove seeds and membrane, and cut peppers into strips or dice depending upon how you plan to use them. Spread out in a single layer on a cookie sheet or pie pan and freeze an hour or longer until frozen solid. Then package and freeze. Hot peppers can be frozen this way but do not need to be cut or chopped before freezing. Note,

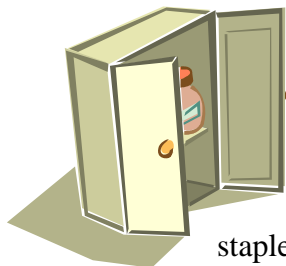


wear plastic or rubber gloves when handling or cutting hot peppers to avoid transferring the oils to your eyes or skin.

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## Cleaning Out the Cupboard

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When you have more time this fall or winter, you might want to look at the foods in your kitchen cupboards. How long should you keep kitchen staples?

Some products have “use by” or “best by” dates. Others are coded. If a product does not contain a date, you can use a permanent marker to write the date you purchased the product. Ten-year-old spices may be safe but aren’t likely to have much “spice” left. Five-year-old baking powder isn’t likely to have much “rising power.” Two-year-old shortening is likely to smell bad (and ruin that tasty chocolate cake you created for a special occasion.)

**Baking powder and baking soda** remain fresh for 12 to 18 months. When baking soda loses its fizz, it can be used as an odor catcher in the refrigerator.

**Ground spices and herbs** keep fresh for one year; whole spices keep for two years. To determine if a ground spice is usable, give it the sniff test. If its aroma is immediate, strong and spicy, it will still add flavor to your foods. Break or crush whole spices to determine their freshness. **Caution:** avoid smelling pepper or chili powder.

**White flour** will keep fresh for 6 to 12 months in a cool, dry place when stored in an airtight container. Excess or low humidity will influence the outcome of a recipe. **Whole wheat flour** will keep one to three months at room temperature. For longer storage, refrigerate flour or freeze it.

Use **brown sugar** within 4 to 6 months for maximum flavor. Store it in an airtight container to prevent its drying out and becoming hard. (If it’s hard as a rock and you don’t have time to soften it with a piece of bread in the container—try heating it in a

250°F oven for a few minutes. As soon as it is soft, measure the amount you need. **Warning:** the sugar will be very hot. When it cools, it will become hard again.)

**Granulated white sugar** will keep indefinitely if stored in an airtight container.

**Shortening** generally keeps 3 to 8 months when opened and 8 to 12 months unopened. Extend the shelf life of shortening by refrigerating it. As shortening ages it becomes rancid and develops an undesirable taste and odor. If it has a strong odor, discard it.

The shelf life of **vegetable oil** varies according to the type of oil and method of processing. A general guideline is one to six months opened and six to twelve months unopened. Like shortening, oil can go rancid—smell it to determine if it is still usable. You can keep oils longer by storing them in the refrigerator. Some oils may become cloudy or begin to solidify in the refrigerator but will usually clear after sitting at room temperature to warm up.

**Vinegar** keeps well because of its acidity. White vinegar will keep longer than other types of vinegar. A general guideline is to keep vinegar no longer than two years unopened and one year opened.

If you found outdated foods in your cupboards, consider buying smaller containers next time.

Practice first in, first out. Place older containers of the same food in front so you reach and use them first.

Keep track of the age of a container by writing on the container the month and year you purchased the food.

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## Problems with Spoilage

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There is no other word but “tragic” to describe the feeling when many jars of home canned food spoil and you have to throw away hours of hard work involved in preserving. Often there is no single factor, but rather a number of practices that could have led to the canning failure.

**Preparing too much food at one time.** It may have taken too long to prepare the food

and bacteria grew in the food while it was at room temperature waiting to be packed into jars or to be placed in the canner. Prepare only enough for one canner load at a time so that the food is not sitting at room temperature more than two hours—less is better.

***Less bacteria is better.*** Reduce chances for bacteria to be present in canned food. Start with quality produce; wash it thoroughly, use clean utensils, bowls, etc.; keep counters clean; avoid cross contamination by using a clean utensil each time you put one into the product; wash your hands often. The fewer bacteria present on the food, the less bacteria that will need to be killed during processing.

***Keep at the job until you are finished.*** Allowing the food to sit overnight encourages the growth of spoilage organisms. Allowing jars to sit in the pressure canner overnight will almost certainly result in spoilage from thermophillic bacteria.

***Even setting prepared food overnight in refrigerator can result in spoilage.*** Because you are working with large volumes when canning, the food may not cool quickly enough. If you have a large amount in the refrigerator, the heat from the food may warm the temperature in the refrigerator above 40°F. If you have set the food in the refrigerator in a stock pot, the height and thickness of the container may prevent the ingredients in the center of the container from reaching the safety zone within 2 hours. It is recommended that food be put into shallow pans for cooling so that nothing is more than 2 inches deep.

***To cool soups or sauces quickly for freezing,*** set the kettle in a sink filled with cold water; stir the contents occasionally so that the warm center contents are moved to the colder outside. Change the water surrounding the pot as it gets warm. If the kettle is especially large, pour contents into two smaller pans.

***Size of the canning jar.*** Most canning instructions for fruits, vegetables, meats, and soups give processing times for pints and quarts. The only products that can be safely processed in half-gallon (2 quart) jars are apple juice and grape juice. In large jars, it takes too long for heat to reach the center of the jar. In fact, only pint jars are suitable for canning

cream-style corn because of the density of the product.

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## Freezing Problems

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Issues for canning also apply to freezing. While bacteria will not grow at freezing temperatures, they are not killed. So if bacteria are present when frozen, they can cause problems when the food is thawed. Start with good quality clean food; prepare it quickly for freezing. Cool items such as soup quickly using the cold water method. Freeze it quickly by preparing small amounts at a time, placing it in the freezer as soon as packaged, using packages no larger than 2 quarts—smaller is even better. Never freeze more than 2 pounds of food for each cubic foot of freezer space. Too much warm food in the freezer at one time increases the number of ice crystals decreasing the quality of the frozen product. Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator—never thaw foods on the counter at room temperature. If you choose to thaw food in the microwave oven, use the food immediately after thawing.

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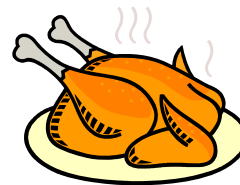
## Turkey Time

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### ***Can stuffed turkey be frozen?***

Stuffing should be frozen separately from the turkey. With any food, the time needed for freezing to take place in the center of the item is the critical factor.



***What is the best way to thaw a frozen uncooked turkey?*** Placing it in the refrigerator is the safest method and will result in the best finished product. It takes about 24 hours for every 5 pounds to thaw the turkey in the refrigerator. An alternate method is to place the turkey wrapped in its plastic wrapping in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes. It takes about 30 minutes per pound to thaw in cold water. When using a microwave oven to thaw a turkey, follow the manufacturer's instructions for the size turkey that will fit in your oven, the minutes per

pound and the power level to use. Turkey thawed in the microwave oven should be cooked immediately.

### **Never defrost turkey on the counter.**

*Is it safe to cook a turkey overnight at a low temperature?* No, the internal temperature of the meat remains in the danger zone. It does not reach temperatures needed to kill harmful bacteria.

*How should leftovers be stored?* Discard any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F. Remove the stuffing from the turkey and carve the extra turkey meat from the bones. Never freeze the stuffing in the turkey. Divide leftovers into smaller portions. Refrigerate or freeze in covered shallow containers for quicker cooling. Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days. Use gravy within 1 to 2 days. Cooked turkey keeps for 3 to 4 months in the freezer.

### **Spicy Apple Jelly**

Tie whole spices such as cloves, allspice, and a cinnamon stick in a spice bag and cook the spices with the apples when preparing the juice. Discard the spices before draining juice in a jelly bag. Adding the spices to the juice makes it worth the time and effort to make what is otherwise a very plain jelly.

### **Resources**

Need answers for those turkey questions?

Try —

- USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline  
Phone 1-888-674-6854
- Let's Talk Turkey Facts Sheets from the Food Safety and Information Service  
[www.fsis.usda.gov/fact\\_sheets/Lets\\_Talk\\_Turkey/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Lets_Talk_Turkey/index.asp)
- The Food Safety and Information Service also has an interesting question and answer web feature called "ask Karen." Go to [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) and click on "ask a food

safety question".

- Information from the National Turkey Federation can be found at [www.eatturkey.com/consumer/prep/prep.html](http://www.eatturkey.com/consumer/prep/prep.html)
- Information about using plastics in the microwave oven can be found at [www.plasticsinfo.org](http://www.plasticsinfo.org) Click on microwave and food prep.

### **Holiday Workshop**

#### ***"Holiday Gifts from the Kitchen Using Home Preserved Foods"***

*What is more special than something you have made yourself? Your kitchen is a perfect place to put together gifts for friends and family. This is a "best of the past" plus a host of new ideas for holiday gift giving. Use your home canned, frozen, and dried products to prepare unique mixes, snacks, breads, desserts, and more. Join us here at the Farm and Home Center on Tuesday, October 23, from 10:00 to noon or 7:00 to 9:00 PM.*

*Workshop fee \$7.50. Call the office (394-6851) to register.*

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