



Let's Preserve Newsletter

Lancaster County

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Dear Home Food Preserver,

July and August have been busy months for us. We have tested over 75 pressure canner dial gauges. Seventy people attended the "Totally Tomatoes" workshop. It is refreshing to see so many new canners attending workshops. We will soon be offering "The Art and Science of Drying Foods," and in October you may want to join us for "Holiday Gifts from the Kitchen Using Home Preserved Foods."

Ag Progress Days at the research farm near State College highlights the best of agricultural sciences at Penn State. At this event, both of us presented a demonstration on preparing frozen and canned pie fillings. In addition, Nancy did a demonstration on tailgating with an emphasis on food safety.

Besides these special events, we have enjoyed answering your phone and email questions.

This summer the Penn State Research Farm at Landisville has tested several varieties of onions. How, one might ask, would you preserve onions? Martha has tested two versions of canned onion relish—both of which look promising.

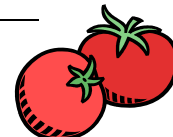
Happy Preserving,

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

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Food of the Month – Tomatoes

Marmalade is a soft spread with the translucent quality and consistency of a jelly and the texture of a jam. Marmalades usually contain citrus fruit. There are an increasing number of recipes for marmalades made with other fruits and even tomatoes combined with one or more citrus fruits. Tomato-Orange Marmalade is an example.

Although the tangy acidic flavor of tomatoes is not usually associated with jams and jellies, the following recipe is delicious when used in special ways. Pour the tomato marmalade over a block of cream cheese or a mound of ricotta

cheese and serve with party crackers for a holiday hors d'oeuvres.

Tomato Marmalade

(about 9 half-pint jars)

3 quarts ripe tomatoes (about 5 ½ pounds tomatoes)
3 oranges
2 lemons
4 sticks cinnamon (3-inch pieces)
6 whole allspice
1 tablespoon whole cloves
6 cups sugar
1 teaspoon salt

To prepare fruit—Peel tomatoes; cut tomatoes in small pieces. Drain. Slice oranges and lemons very thin; quarter the slices. Tie cinnamon, allspice and cloves in a cheesecloth bag.

To make marmalade—Sterilize canning jars. Place tomatoes in a large kettle. Add sugar and salt; stir until dissolved. Add oranges, lemons and spice bag. Boil rapidly, stirring constantly, until thick and clear (about 50 minutes).

[*Caution: As the mixture thickens it has a tendency to stick to the bottom of the pan.*

Lower heat and stir constantly to avoid burning.] Remove from heat; skim. Pour hot marmalade into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Source: So Easy to Preserve

Salsa

Salsa has surpassed catsup as America's favorite condiment. The following recipe is one of the thicker home canned salsa recipes. It is thicker because it uses paste or Roma type tomatoes and it uses bottled lemon juice for the needed acidity. It takes less lemon juice than vinegar to acidify low acid foods. Partially seeding the tomatoes also reduces some of the liquid. This recipe works best with paste tomatoes. Slicing tomatoes require a much longer cooking time to achieve a desirable consistency. The original recipe made a large amount, so I halved the recipe for you. The

most difficult part of the recipe is cutting the tomatoes.

Tomato Salsa Using Paste Tomatoes

3 ½ quarts peeled, cored, chopped tomatoes (about 7 pounds.)
2 cups seeded, chopped long green chilies
2 ½ cups chopped onion
¼ cup seeded, finely chopped jalapeno peppers*
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup bottled lemon juice
1 tablespoon salt
1 ½ teaspoons black pepper**
1 tablespoon ground cumin (optional)
1 ½ tablespoons oregano leaves (optional)
1 tablespoon fresh cilantro (optional)

Combine all ingredients except cumin, oregano and cilantro in a large pot and bring to a boil, stirring frequently; then reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Add spices and simmer for another 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Ladle hot into pint jars, leaving ½ inch headspace. Adjust lids and process in a boiling water canner for 15 minutes at altitudes below 1000 feet.

Yield: about 8 pints.

* Always wear plastic or rubber gloves when handling hot chilies.

** I used whole pepper corns and put them in a spice bag for easy removal.

I used fresh oregano and cilantro.

Source: Pacific Northwest Extension Publication

Salsa Guidelines:

- Do not substitute vinegar for lemon juice, but you can substitute lemon juice for vinegar. Lemon juice is more acidic.
- Do not reduce the amount of lemon juice or tomatoes.
- Do not add extra peppers, onion, or garlic. You can reduce the amount of peppers, onion, or garlic.
- Canned chilies may be used in place of fresh.
- You can substitute one type of pepper for another. For the workshop, I made a slightly hot version using hot jalapeno peppers and included the garlic. My own tastes are for a milder version, and I used a combination of

bell peppers and cubinal peppers in place of some of the long green chilies and the jalapenos. I omitted the garlic. Therefore, I was not increasing the amount of low acid ingredients in relation to the amount of high acid ingredients.

Salsa Resources:

“Salsa Recipes for Canning” is a booklet of tested salsa recipes. Contact the cooperative extension office for a free copy. You can also find salsa recipes on the National Center for Home Food Preservation web site:

www.uga.edu/nchfp Follow links to salsa recipes.

Canning Skills

Canning Fruit With Less Sugar

While it is safe to can fruit without added sugar, the quality of the product may be compromised. Sugar helps fruits keep their bright color and firm texture.

If you desire less sweetness or reduced calories, try using lighter syrup. Just reduce the amount of sugar in relation to the water. You may need to experiment to determine how much sugar you can eliminate and still find the product acceptable.

Another alternative is to can the fruit in frozen or bottled unsweetened juice. Reconstituted frozen apple juice concentrate works well with peaches, pears, apricots, plums, and red or white sweet cherries. It can be diluted with extra water to reduce the apple flavor and reduce calories further. Frozen pineapple juice works well with pears or peaches. Frozen pineapple juice gives a fresher flavor than canned pineapple juice. White grape juice works well with pears, peaches, or apricots; and red grape juice compliments plums and red cherries. When canning peaches or pears in fruit juice, a stick of cinnamon can be added to each jar for added flavor.

Mild flavored honey can be used in canning syrups, but honey has more calories per tablespoon than sugar. Honey does taste sweeter than an equal amount of sugar.

For those on special diets that must avoid all added sugar, fruit can be canned in water without any added sugar. However, you may find the fruit is less firm than you are accustomed to.

When canning fruit without sugar, use the hot pack method; i.e. cook the fruit in water until hot throughout before packing the hot fruit into hot jars and then add boiling water to cover, seal and process.

Most artificial sweeteners should be added when the canned goods are served rather than using them in canning. Heat applied during processing may cause the loss of sweetening power or cause an unpleasant after taste or flavor change. Sucralose (Splenda®) is an exception and can be used in canning fruit. Sucralose will maintain its sweetness but will not promote the firmness of the fruit any better than canning in water.

Buckled Lids

Sometimes a lid on a jar comes out of the canner with a buckle. This is because the screw band is turned too tightly before processing. The band needs to be tight enough to keep water from entering the jar but loose enough to allow heated, expanded air to escape between the sealant and jar top. If it is too tight, the air is trapped and it pushes the lid up from inside making it impossible for the lid to seal as it cools because it is misshaped. If you have this problem, try tightening the screw band as tight as you can using only your fingertips and then drop your hand down onto the lid and give it another quarter turn only.

Remove Screw Bands During Storage

Remove screw bands after jars have cooled; wash them thoroughly and dry completely. They will then be ready for storage and can be used again. However, never reuse lids as you will likely get seal failure. Leaving screw bands on the jars during storage results in their rusting onto the jar and causing the seal to release. It may also hide an unsealed lid. If a lid is sealed properly, it is not necessary to store the jar with the band on.

One Spoiled Jar

You discover one jar of your home canned tomatoes has spoiled. Should you be concerned about the safety of the rest of the jars? If proper procedures were used in canning the food, the single spoiled jar probably was the result of a jar lid failure that allowed spoilage organisms to enter the jar. If jars were improperly canned, then it is possible all jars contain spoilage organisms and their contents should be destroyed.

Changing Recipes

You like lots of peppers in your salsa or extra onion in your spaghetti. Is it safe to add extra or other ingredients to research tested recipes or to canning mixes that you buy? No.



Always follow directions on a mix exactly and follow tested recipes as written. Changing an ingredient may dilute or lower the acidity level

changing the processing time or method. The exceptions to the rule of never change anything in canning recipes are you can change the salt level in anything except pickles, you can change the sugar level in syrup used for canned fruit, and you can add extra vinegar or lemon juice. See changes possible in salsa in the previous article about salsa.

What is Mold?

Mold is a fungi that grows as tiny threads and appears as fuzz on food. There are many types of mold. Some molds produce mycotoxins which are harmful to eat.

How does mold get inside a jar? Molds are commonly present in the air and can settle on food while you are packing food into the jar. Mold growth inside a sealed jar indicates that the food was not processed after mold got into the air space between the lid and the food. This would be the case with open kettle canning when the hot food is just poured into the jar without any processing—a canning method that is no longer recommended. Because molds are easily destroyed when food is heated to temperatures between 140°F and 190°F, processing in a boiling water bath is more than

adequate to kill them. Mold can also enter a jar that is not sealed properly. Therefore, it is important to use two piece lids and process the foods for the specified time to create a strong vacuum seal. Paraffin wax used to seal jelly and jams easily cracks around the edges allowing molds to enter and grow beneath the wax.

Molds differ from bacteria in that molds thrive on the acids that are a protection against bacteria. Therefore, you can find mold growing in a jar of fruit or pickles.

Mold can also be found on refrigerated food. Here again there are molds in the air that deposit themselves on the food and find a good growth medium.

Is it safe to eat food that has surface mold? Molds that produce mycotoxins are not safe to eat. Because you cannot identify which molds produce mycotoxins, it is not safe to eat moldy food. Molds grow long silk-like threads that extend beyond the visual patch of mold that you see. For this reason you cannot just scrape the mold off the surface.

How to Make Water Softer

The minerals in hard water may cause pickles to be soft and/or discolored. If you have hard water, reduce the minerals by letting the water set overnight in a glass, enamel, or stainless steel pan; then the next day gently pour off the top of the water into another container. Use the top portion in making pickles.

Penny Wise—Pound Foolish

Some practices sound like good ideas but can lead to bad consequences. All of these are practices I've heard about this summer:

Reusing leftover pickling solution. If the pickling solution is fresh and has not been used to make pickles, cover it and store it in the refrigerator for later use. If the pickling solution has been used to cook cucumbers, it should not be reused for pickles. During the cooking of the fresh cucumbers, liquid is released that reduces the acidity of the syrup; reusing it could lead to food poisoning. Instead, refrigerate the excess brining solution and use within 1 to 2 days for

barbecue sauce, to flavor fresh cucumber slices, in coleslaw or as a marinade.

Reusing commercial pickle jars and lids.

Commercial jars are intended for one use only. Putting hot pickles in old pickle jars and applying the old one piece lid is risky. The jar may not seal at all; if it does, the seal may not be strong enough to hold during storage. The product may spoil if not processed.

Reusing jar lids. The sealing compound on the jar lid forms an indentation when the jar seals. Applying the lid a second time can cut through the soft sealing compound causing a seal failure. It is not worth the risk of losing a jar of canned food to reuse a jar lid.

Convenient Crumbles

Create your own crumbles for use in recipes such as soups, sauces, and even sloppy joes. Brown ground meat; freeze at 0°F or lower, and use within 2 to 3 months for best flavor and quality. Here are some additional tips:

- Use 90% lean or higher quality ground meat. Brown no more than 1 pound at a time. When large amounts are done at one time, moisture is released and the meat is steamed rather than browned.
- Brown meat in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat until meat is no longer pink. Break up into ¾ inch crumbles. Remove meat with a slotted spoon.
- Avoid using iron or aluminum cooking utensils that speed flavor changes.
- Brown crumbles with onions or unroasted bell peppers if desired. Rosemary, sage, marjoram, thyme, mace, allspice, or cloves are suitable seasonings that also help slow flavor changes.
- Salt may hasten undesirable flavor changes in crumbles. Add salt when you are ready to use crumbles in your recipe.
- Freezing the crumbles as part of a sauce, such as spaghetti sauce, helps preserve flavor. Cover the entire meat surface with the sauce.

- Cool and refrigerate crumbles promptly in shallow containers. Meat does not have to be cooled completely before being refrigerated. Cover loosely until completely cooled. Then promptly transfer to plastic freezer bags. Eliminate air pockets.
- Freezing crumbles in a thinner, flattened shape in freezer bags will hasten freezing (and thawing later). Do not stack packages until the meat is completely frozen. Flat packages also stack better in your freezer.

Keeping quality will depend upon the kind of meat used, fat content of the meat, seasonings and/or sauces added, packaging materials, and how quickly the crumbles were frozen. Plain beef crumbles will maintain good quality for about 3 months, pork crumbles slightly less, and poultry crumbles for a shorter time. Crumbles frozen in spaghetti or tomato sauce keep well longer.

Adapted from Lancaster.unl.edu/food/ciq-beef-crumbles.

Drying Fruit Rolls

A Treat for Children

Fruit roll-ups, also known as fruit leathers for their appearance and texture, are made from dehydrated fruit sauce. They are a concentrated source of energy and flavor. The quickest way to make a fruit roll is to pour 2 cups of unsweetened canned applesauce onto a cookie sheet lined with plastic wrap or non-stick foil, such as Release®. Do not use waxed paper or regular foil because the leather will stick. You can also make a puree from fresh, frozen, or drained canned fruit. Very juicy fruits such as berries can be thickened with applesauce. Adding 2 teaspoons lemon juice or 1/8 teaspoon ascorbic acid to each 2 cups of light colored fruit prevents darkening of the fruit.

Because of the concentration of natural sugars during drying, additional sweeteners are not needed. If you desire a sweeter product, add ¼ to ½ cup corn syrup, honey or sugar for each

2 cups of fruit. Sugar is the least desirable choice because it will crystallize over time.

Spread the puree evenly about ¼ inch thick onto prepared trays. Depending upon the fruit used, its moisture content, size, and type of dryer; the leather may take anywhere from 6 hours to several days to dry. Ideal drying temperature is 140°F. Fruit leathers can also be dried in an oven if you can set the oven as low as 150°F. Test for dryness by touching the center of the leather; no indentation should be evident and no “wet” spots should show. While still warm, peel from the sheet and roll; allow to cool and re-wrap the roll in plastic wrap. Store up to 1 month at room temperature and up to one year if frozen.

More Tips

Extra marshmallows. Freeze marshmallows to prevent them from becoming stale.

Quicker thawing. For quicker thawing of a casserole, or a pack of ground meat, leave a hole in the center. Place an empty plastic cup upright in the center of a pan before you freeze it. This practice is suitable for refrigerator thawing or where you can remove the cup from the food before microwave thawing—do not heat with plastic in the food. Also thinner, flatter packs will thaw more quickly than deep thick ones.

Never thaw meats or poultry at room temperature. Only breads, cookies, and baked products that do not contain cream or custard fillings can be thawed at room temperature.

Flavor cubes. Fill ice cube trays with fresh chopped parsley, add enough boiling water to cover and freeze. (The boiling water takes the place of blanching and helps to preserve the color.) Cubes can be removed from trays and put in a freezer bag for long term storage. Just add a cube to sauces and soups for great flavor as needed.



Freezing Herbs. According to Carol Costenbader in *Preserving the Harvest*, these herbs freeze well: basil, chervil, chives, cilantro

(coriander), dill, most kinds of mint, parsley, savory, sweet fennel, and some kinds of thyme.

Workshops

“The Art and Science of Drying Foods,”
Thursday, September 13, 2007
10:00 AM to 12 noon or 7:00 to 9:00 PM.

“Holiday Gifts from the Kitchen Using Home Preserved Foods,”
Tuesday, October 23, 2007
10:00 AM to 12 noon or 7:00 to 9:00 PM.

All workshops are at the Farm and Home Center, cost is \$7.50 per workshop. Call the office at 717-394-6851 to register.

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