

Save It For Later

From John

It's that time of year again; time to think about putting up some of the summer's bounty to get you through until next season. Storing vegetables is a lot of work no matter how you do it.

Sometimes it's a lot of fun, other times it's the last thing you want to do on a Sunday afternoon. But one thing is for certain, no matter how you look at it, you will be really glad you did it when you're all done. If you need some motivation I suggest you download 'Canned Goods' by Greg Brown, the long version from 'The Live One' album. I can't think of a more appropriate song if you are looking for the nostalgic feeling of food preservation. One day, when we have our own farm we plan on having a large kitchen, either outside or in a shed for canning. A place with big ranges to accommodate several large pots at a time or a canning assembly line where we can come together for canning parties and put away lots vegetables in a day. Until then it's making the best of our cramped kitchen and helping you to do the same at home. Canning (I am using the term generically for all forms of food preservation) can be a wonderful communal event. Get together some friends, favorite recipes, piles of fruit and veggies and grab some beers or wine, put on some music and have some fun with it.

So to get to the specific's there are many angles you can take when saving the bounty. Each has its benefits and drawbacks and largely depends on your personal preferences. There are many resources out there that can help, whether online, from the library or friends and family that have lots of experience. But here is some practical guidance to get you started.

There are at least four types of canning; water bath, pressure, refrigerator and lacto-fermentation. In addition, there is also freezing and dehydrating as ways of storing extra produce. At its simplest food preservation can be hanging a bunch of basil, parsley or cilantro on a string and then crumbling it up a few weeks later. Drying herbs (and chili peppers for flakes) takes minimal skill and not much more than a piece of string (and a needle if you want to thread it through chilies). Just keep them away from high humidity and light

ON DECK

A variety of fall greens should be available along with herbs, beets, potatoes, peppers, onions, garlic, eggplant and tomatoes

if possible. If done in the dark the herbs will maintain their green color, when exposed to light they will turn grayish, brown which is just fine. If you want to make the investment you can also buy a food dehydrator in order to dry tomatoes, berries, meats and a variety of fruits. We don't have experience with these and can't offer a lot of advice with them. Freezing is the preferred method for many vegetables and fruits. The only drawback to freezing is that it requires a freezer and the electric to run it. If neither of these is a problem then, it is the way to go for many crops. We use it for corn, beans, broccoli, kale (and other hearty greens), peppers. It also works well for carrots, beets and other root crops. Usually all it requires is a pot of boiling water, a bowl of ice water a knife and some freezer bags. The water is to blanch the vegetable, meaning you cook them very briefly (about a minute) and then chill them. This is partly for bacteria, but mostly because it basically hits the biological off switch within the vegetable so it won't keep ripening (and therefore rot). You don't need to do this with peppers, and frankly we have found corn to keep quite well without blanching. However it is critical for broccoli and other cole-crops and all greens. Freezing has fast become a favorite for tomatoes as well. It certainly is a lot less work than traditional canning. The main concern with freezing is what happens if the power goes out, though if you have a deep freezer; it should stay frozen for a few days if you can refrain from opening and closing it as much as possible. Generally, we prefer water-bath and pressure canning. They are the most work but we feel the advantages tilt the scale in their favor. It is a must for things like meats, soups and stock and we like the shelf stability. With other preservation methods, there is a much shorter shelf life than with water-bath or pressure. I just found a pint of salsa from 2009, I was a bit worried about it, but it was as fresh and tasty as could be, even at 3 years old. We use the different methods depending on what we are preserving, so it is important to differentiate the two methods. A water bath canner is basically a giant pot

with a lid. You completely submerge your jars in water and boil them for 10-30 minutes depending on the recipe. We use this for things that are made with a preservative such as salt, sugar and vinegar. These include things such as jams, jellies, pears, peaches, pickled beets, beans and cucumbers. The combination of salt, sugar and/or vinegar along with cooking at 212° makes a very safe and stable product. The pressure canner is what we like for whole tomatoes, sauces, salsa, soups and other things without salt or sugar (they may have salt, sugar or vinegar in the recipe, but not in large enough quantities to act as a preservative). The function of a pressure cooker is to raise the boiling point. We all know that water boils at 212°F at atmospheric pressure, but under increased pressure the boiling point increases. We can at 15psi which increases the boiling point to between 240° - 250°, which is more than enough to make sure we have no worries about contamination. Pressure canners can be dangerous so it is important to understand how to operate it, though after a few runs it will be second nature.

No matter what method you choose it is important to maintain a clean work environment, wash and rinse all produce to be preserved and to follow all instructions for sterilizing your tools and storage containers. I would also add, do not reuse freezer bags for another round in the freezer. Also, with mason jars, the jar and the band can be used for years and years, but throw out the lid. Used lids rarely seal correctly will cause problems. The most important things are to have fun with it and know that you can enjoy your favorite foods all winter. And if you are confused, just ask someone, ask a friend, ask us, ask Google or ask your Grandma. There are lots of people ready to help.

News and Notes

- DON'T forget the farm Potluck on Sunday September 9th at 1-4PM. We will need to rent tables and chairs so please RSVP so we have an accurate guest count.
- We still have some storage root boxes available for sale. What's a root box? It's a box of 40 -50 pounds of mixed storage veggies from potatoes, onions and garlic to beets, rutabaga, carrots and winter squash for just \$50 a box. They will be available the week after the end of the CSA season.
- We will begin delivering chickens on October 9th, which is CSA Week #19. We will hold the price at \$4.00/pound. Please fill out and return an [order form](#) to reserve your birds
- If you want more tomatoes for canning we have them for sale. They are #2 tomatoes (ugly but edible) in a 20# box for 20 bucks.

Featured Item

This week we are featuring food preservation. It was a struggle even in 1100 words to say what I wanted about storing your veggies. So just a few more tips. Go to Fleet Farm, I have never seen a better selection of canners, vacuum sealers, jars, bags, tools and ingredients. I prefer to use pickling salt (no iodine) which prevents discoloration but it is not necessary. You can use some lemon juice or buy ascorbic acid which will also prevent discoloration as well. Again, not necessary but nice. Supplies can be expensive up front but are a once in a lifetime investment. Don't feel like you have to make it all from scratch, especially if a novice. Buy the ready-made pickle packs, pectins, sugar syrups and the like. The most important thing is to start simple and take on more when comfortable.



A good lazy Sunday afternoon; 1G of cherry tomatoes, 1G beefsteaks, 1G of dill pickles and 2Qt of sweet pickles.

Recipe of the Week

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon whole allspice
- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
- 1 bay leaf, crumbled
- 1 cinnamon stick (2 inches)
- 2 cardamom pods
- 3 or 4 whole cloves
- 3 or 4 whole black pepper

Directions:

1 Combine all ingredients, and store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 10 days. If you don't have a pickling pouch to use, I found a carefully folded and stapled coffee filter does a really nice job of containing your spice mix to infuse into your pickling liquid.

This is a guideline but you can get very creative with your pickling mix, so don't think missing a couple of ingredients will ruin the whole thing.