



REV UP NUTRITION, SLASH FOOD COSTS BY PRESERVING LOCAL FOOD



By Patti Griffith

Preserving locally grown food gives consumers more control over what they eat, and fresher tasting food may increase mealtime nutrition.

Wyoming's short growing season and limited access to locally grown foods make it easier to justify efforts of preserving the bounty from fresh-grown produce when available to extend seasonal enjoyment.

While the concept of "living sustainably" has increased in appeal, many may ask, "How do I preserve the food I find at farmers' markets or pick-your-own farms?" Home food preservation may be crucial to extending the enjoyment of Wyoming's short growing season, but, "What do I do, and which type fits my needs best?"

So consider for yourself what the general options are with the list below. Once you've narrowed down the type of preservation, we will strive to help you, although sometimes we can't find a trusted source for a quality and safe product. In fact, we get recipe requests for some pretty unusual things.

Christine Pasley, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) nutrition and food safety educator serving Goshen, Laramie, and Platte counties, notes, "Often, we have people call the extension office for recipes like Mom or Grandma used to preserve. Recently, I had a pretty unusual one; I had a person ask for a recipe for 'pickled cherries,' among other canning information. We don't have a tested (safe) recipe for that."

Types of food preservation

The three most common forms of home food preservation are drying, canning, which includes pickling and fermentation, and freezing. Each has its pros and cons, but it's your decision which major factor – money, time, and/or taste – influences the method best suited to you.

Canning

Canning requires proper equipment, which, once purchased, can be used year to year, replacing the jars, lids, and rings as needed. This method also requires a heat



source and knowledge of temperatures and proper processing methods necessary to prevent spoilage or risk of food poisoning. Canned foods can be stored up to a year and do not require refrigeration.

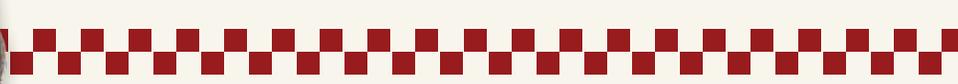
Freezing

Freezing is one of the easiest methods to store food, and frozen foods taste closest to fresh. This requires maintaining/purchasing a freezer, cost of possible repairs, and the cost of electricity to operate at the correct temperature. Foods must be frozen at 0 degree F or below to prevent growth of microorganisms, which can cause foods to spoil and lose their quality. At this temperature, they will retain their nutrients, color, flavor, and texture closest to fresh.

Dehydration

Dehydration is the least popular and most time consuming. It is best for making food small for storage or carrying on trips. Food is easily restored to its original plumpness or juiciness by adding water, but not every food is suitable, such as high moisture foods like melons. When compared to buying a freezer or a full canning setup, startup costs are the least for this option.

Choosing a method that works includes weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each method for your situation:



Articles examine home canning, making jerky at home

Here are food preservation stories in previous *Barnyards & Backyards* magazines. They are now available on the barnyard-sandbackyards.com Web site by clicking on the "Resources" link and then "Food Preservation & Safety."

- Summer 2006: "Safe food preservation keeps home canners from getting into a pickle," by Christine Pasley, pages 14-15.
- Winter 2007, "Making safe jerky at home: the basics," by Warrie Means and Suzy Pelican, pages 8-10.

Great resources to learn about food preservation!

Links to these resources are available on the barnyardsandbackyards.com Web site by clicking on the "Resources" link and then "Food Preservation & Safety."

- *Canner's Corner* fact sheets can be purchased at a local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office or are available free online.
- UW CES Food and Nutrition Safety Web site
- National Center for Home Food Preservation.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture *Complete Guide to Home Canning*.
- University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture: "Homemade canning takes time and practice."
- University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture: "Freezing an economical way to preserve."
- wikiHow: "How to Choose a Method of Food Preservation."



- Space available for storing your product.
- Local climate affecting the length of the growing season and storage suitability.
- Available equipment – what is the initial investment; what is on hand?
- Cost – compare the cost of purchasing, storage, distance to a supermarket, purchasing equipment, and supplies. Be sure to factor in the enjoyment of preserving your own food, environmental considerations such as storing food in a high moisture area or a dry, cool area, health and nutritional benefits, and the cost of raising it in the garden.
- Nature of the food – some foods produce a better product depending on the method of preservation, and some should be eaten fresh. Bananas, for example, dehydrate well but are not suitable for canning.
- Hygiene and safety – consider your ability to maintain the strictest hygiene and safety measures while preserving the product.

- Other issues – home food preservation may allow more control over preservatives, sugar, and salt found in commercially produced food.

Using proper procedures absolutely critical

Whatever process you chose, use scientifically tested procedures and recipes to ensure safe, high-quality canned, frozen, or dehydrated food. See sidebar above for references that provide excellent starting points for both new and experienced canners.

The key to properly preserving food at home is careful planning and preparation. It's important to start with fresh ingredients. This gives farmers' markets, pick-your-own, and home gardens the advantage.

For best quality, just-harvested produce should be processed within six to 12 hours for most vegetables, one to two days for most fruit, and within two days for fresh meat. Bruised or moldy food should not be used, and bruises or lesions should be removed prior to preparing the food for processing.

For more information, contact a local UW CES office. Contact information is at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp>.

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