



Safe food PRESERVATION keeps FROM GETTING

Living in rural Wyoming often means the ability to grow vegetables and fruits on a grander scale than your counterparts in town. But what to do with the bounty of your garden when harvest comes? Here are some strategies to consider so you can enjoy the harvest all year!

Canning

Do you want to can corn? Freezing is easier – but the freezer may not have enough space. With canning, produce can be kept handy on a dry, dark shelf at 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit; however, special equipment is needed.

Depending on the produce, a pressure canner (not “cooker” or “saucepan”) for low-acid foods, or a hot water bath canner for high-acid foods, is needed. Whenever a dial-gauge pressure canner is obtained, check with a local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) office about annual testing for the accuracy of the gauge. A weighted gauge canner does not need testing because the “weight” never changes. Pressure canner gaskets need to be kept in good shape – not cracked or brittle. Dial gauge, gasket, and safety valve replacements are available at local hardware stores.

For best results, use “regulation canning jars,” commercially available canning jars having vacuum seal lids and rings. Mayonnaise-type jars do not have a consistent edge for sealing that canning jars do. They may also have hairline cracks in the glass or chips on the edge and break during processing.

Proper tools will make canning easier and help prevent burns. A jar lifter, a lid lifter, and a large canning funnel are needed. Consider using pasta strainers or multi-cookers. These consist of a strainer that fits into

a large saucepan. These work efficiently for blanching (boiling for a short period of time, which eliminates certain enzymes) fruits or vegetables for freezing or canning, and they work well for other kitchen jobs as well.

The first goal in canning is to kill spoilage – and disease-causing microorganisms – and to seal jars to prevent microorganisms from reentering food. Canning should retain the nutrition of the food while maintaining taste and appearance. Start with wholesome, sound food. Bruised, moldy, or overripe food will affect the product flavor and the seal of the jar.

The jar must be filled to the correct level so all parts are heated sufficiently to create a safe, finished product. Canning directions will provide the “head space” depth – the distance between the lid and the top of the food. Fill the jar with hot produce and liquid, put the jar lid and ring on snugly, and add it to the canner for processing.

Fill the pressure canner with only one to two inches of water. This creates the correct amount of steam and pressure within the canner. Once the lid is on, allow steam to escape for 10 minutes prior to pressuring. This will help the canner maintain a constant temperature and avoid water loss. Keep the pressure at the recommended level for the specified amount of time. Once processed, take the canner off the burner to cool. Once it returns to 0 pounds of pressure, give it an additional 10 minutes prior to unlocking and removing the lid – do this away from your body to avoid scalding.



A pasta strainer and pan work very well in cooking or blanching produce for canning or freezing.



HOME CANNERS INTO A PICKLE



The hot water bath canner should be filled to 1 to 2 inches above the top of the filled jars. As water boils away, additional hot water should be added to maintain the level.

The highest temperatures obtained in canning jars usually occur during cooling. Letting jars cool naturally at room temperature is important. Avoid any effort to cool jars quickly. Remove jars from the canner with a jar lifter and place them on a wood cutting board or a clean dish towel to cool. Protect the vacuum seal by not moving jars during the cooling process.

Wait 12 to 24 hours before removing the canning rings and cleaning and labeling the jars for storage. Label jars with the name of the food and the date. Information – such as raw or hot pack, light or heavy syrup, salt or no salt – can be added to help determine whether to use the same methods again. The food is best used within a year.

Prior to eating, boil low-acid canned foods (meats and vegetables) for 10 minutes plus one minute for each additional 1,000 feet above sea level, i.e. a total of 15 minutes at 5,000 feet elevation.

Freezing

Freezer bags or containers are those labeled “freezer” and not “storage.” Freezer bags are heavier to protect frozen food from drying – or “freezer burn.” Produce, with few exceptions, should be blanched prior to freezing to eliminate ripening enzymes. The length of time depends on the particular product but is available in the *Preserving Food in Wyoming* bulletins (see story at right).

Bon appetite!

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How to get started

Check out the UW CES *Preserving Food in Wyoming* bulletins at a local CES office or at http://www.uwyo.edu/CES/PUBS/FCS/FCS_Pubs_Main.html.

Information on food preservation is also available at www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preser.htm.

Old canning books, published prior to 1989, are not reliable or safe as produce has changed over the years, as have micro-organisms. For example, tomatoes are less acidic now. The *U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Complete Guide to Home Canning* and the *Preserving Food in Wyoming* bulletins provide tested canning information known to be safe at high altitudes. Pdf versions of all sections of the USDA's *Complete Guide to Home Canning* can be accessed for free at http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preserve/USDA_Home_Canning.htm.

Copies of the same guide, AB-539, may be obtained for \$11 each by e-mailing the College of Agriculture's Resource Center at bixbyd@uwyo.edu, calling the center at (307) 766-2115, or writing to the University of Wyoming, College of Agriculture, Department 3313, 1000 E. University Ave., Laramie, WY 82071.

Avoid adding ingredients to tested recipes because they alter the pH and thermal process and can result in an unsafe product. Other ingredients can be added as you prepare food for a meal, if desired.