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# Home canning is food preservation

BY SHARON JOHNSON

Summer's fruit and vegetable bounty has been plentiful in the Applegate. Your family may have been enjoying garden-fresh produce daily over the last several months. But with the end of summer upon us, it's entirely possible you have huge baskets of just-picked apples or ready-to-harvest green beans poised and ready for further attention—calling out to the food preserver in you to “get busy.”

If you want to preserve garden produce but have any questions about how to do it safely—help is on the way. Oregon State University Extension Service in Jackson and Josephine counties provides reliable, research-based information about food preservation, as well as mini-classes on selected topics. Dozens of trained and certified Family Food Educator Volunteers (master food preservers) are ready to support and assist you in assuring your pantry is full of delicious, safe-to-eat “canned” foods.

Oregon State University Extension Service even has a statewide hotline that operates from 9 am to 4 pm Monday through Friday until September 30. Call 1-800-354-7319 to talk directly with an experienced master food preserver (located in Lane County).

It has been referred to as “home canning” for over 100 years, but the better title is “food preservation” and it can be done in a variety of ways. There are, in fact, four approaches to preserving food: 1. dehydration (drying), 2. freezing, 3. boiling water canning and 4. pressure canning.

In order to preserve food safely and successfully, certain basic principles need to be considered. With water-bath (or boiling water) canning, as well as with pressure canning, the pH (or acidity) determines the method of heat processing you will use to assure a safely canned product.

Foods to be canned are divided into two categories: 1. acid (or high-acid) and 2. low-acid. Your just-picked basket of apples could be preserved using a water-bath method, which allows you to make anything from applesauce to apple jelly. Fruits of any kind are considered high acid, tomatoes included, although the acidity of tomatoes varies more than in times past and adding bottled lemon juice is necessary. Use a well-tested recipe for tomato canning and follow the directions closely. Don't use fresh lemon juice; the acidity of fresh lemons is too variable.

Your low-acid, ready-to-pick green beans will require pressure canning and you will need to assure you have a pressure canner in which the well-fitting lid has a dial or weighted gauge that has been checked recently for accuracy. (They'll do that at the Extension office in both counties, too; the cost is \$1-2.00). Low-acid foods include vegetables, meats, poultry and seafood.

Freezing and drying are somewhat simpler, less time-consuming forms of food preservation. Freezer jams are very popular right now as are dried fruit leathers.

Extension publications will tell you how to make both of those products as well as how to freeze or dehydrate all types of fruits and vegetables.

Jackson and Josephine counties trained and annually re-certified Master Food Preservers have a few practical reminders for you before you begin to preserve.

1. Food preservation allows you to have complete control over the quality of the ingredients that go into your food. Opt for top-quality fresh produce in order to assure the best finished product.

2. Processing times and pressures are critical and are influenced by the elevation in your specific geographic area. Be sure you know your elevation (or altitude) before you start.

3. OSU Extension informational pamphlets and/or a current “Ball Blue Book: Guide to Home Canning and Freezing” are essential. Grandma's old recipes are often no longer safe. Contact the Extension office (541-776-7371 in Jackson County and 541-476-6613 in Josephine County) or go on-line: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu> and click on the publications link.

OSU Extension mini-classes on food preservation are at the OSU Extension Auditorium (569 Hanley Road, Central Point). On Thursday, September 25, from 7-9 pm, you can attend “A Beauti-fall Pear Up!” Family Food Educators will showcase a variety of ways to preserve pears and apples in butters, sauces and relishes. Each of those classes costs only \$5. Register by calling 541-776-7371.

And when you call, remember that the Family Food Educator Volunteers in Jackson County have a newly published “Zucchini Cookbook” with delicious recipes (including nutritional detail for each recipe) that might help with your abundant zucchini harvest.

In Josephine County, an all-day “Food Preservation 101” is planned for Saturday, September 27 at the Josephine County Auditorium at 215 Ringuette in Grants Pass (9 am-3 pm). \$10.00 fee. Register by calling 541-476-6613.

And if you want to meet some of these Extension Family Food Educators and talk to them in person, come to the Southern Oregon Research and Extension “Celebrate the Harvest” event on Saturday, September 13, at 569 Hanley Road.

Look for the folks with orange shirts and OSU aprons—count on them to be smiling broadly.

Sharon Johnson  
 541-776-7371 extension 210  
 OSU Extension faculty  
 and  
 Family Food Educator Volunteers  
 OSU Extension (Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center)  
 569 Hanley Road  
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