Preserving Garden Produce
2013 How-To Festival at LFPL
By Tomese Buthod
Jefferson County Cooperative Extension Master Gardener

- **County Cooperative Extension** has lots of materials – pick up at 810 Barret Ave. or print at home from website [www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf) for the Gardening workbook) The Family and Consumer Sciences area on the website offers a whole section on preserving food -- from making jerky and cottage cheese to canning, freezing and drying.

- **First rule of thumb** – eat as much as you can when it is fresh! Preserving food is great – but it is full of compromises in texture, flavor and nutrition.

- **To eat from your pantry all year does take some garden planning.**
  - With our climate, we can keep quite a few things growing all winter – cilantro, carrots, cole crops, leeks, radishes and other root crops.
  - Winter squashes and sweet potatoes keep for months in the basement. Not very energy-efficient, but a refrigerator in your basement/garage set on warmest temperature is a great way to hold potatoes and other root vegetables.
  - In-ground storage is another option. I haven’t done it myself yet, but I’m investigating using straw and/or sand.
  - Freezing is very easy but takes electricity all year long. I use my freezer to store:
    - Oven roasted cherry tomatoes
    - Peas (blanched first)
    - Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, cherries
    - Grated zucchini – makes a great pasta sauce, a recipe from Barbara Kingsolver ([http://animalvegetablemiracle.com/recipes-summer-disappearing-zucchini-orzo.htm](http://animalvegetablemiracle.com/recipes-summer-disappearing-zucchini-orzo.htm)). Thaw and drain if using frozen zucchini.
    - Pesto and herbs like basil, parsley, rosemary, sage, chives and thyme. You can dry herbs, but I feel they lose too much flavor.
Tomato bounty: Crock Pot tomato sauce

Wash and core your tomatoes, cut in half or quarters, load up your slow cooker to overflowing. You can also add a chopped onion if you like.

Set the lid on top; turn it on high, walk away for several hours. Use a turkey baster to drain off liquid to reduce time. That tomato “water” can be used for soups or drinking. The tomatoes are perfect for soup, chili, sauces, and pizza.

You can freeze or can. It’s optional to run through a food mill to remove seeds and skins.

Another option: Dry them. I slice tomatoes and dry them in an electric dehydrator. We have too much humidity and too many insects for me to feel comfortable using the outdoors.

I also dry apples, pears, figs, peaches and berries, buying quantities when they are cheapest at peak season.

- Drying is a compromise on full nutrition. Many vegetables and fruit lose a lot of nutrition this way – canning or freezing is better for that. Preserving food is full of compromises – weighing texture, flavor and nutrition.

Last resort for tomatoes: Put whole tomatoes in the freezer and use them in soups or can them later,

Peppers: You can freeze fresh peppers whole or chopped. I roast them and remove skins. It’s easy to break off what you need for soup, to enrich pasta sauces and add great flavor. Lots of people I know dry hot peppers, but I have not done that.
Canning

Don’t be afraid of pressure canning. It takes much less water and energy and is quick. It’s important, of course, to follow documented procedures for safety.

What you need to get started:
- Ball Blue Book is excellent source for recipes and canning timetables
- Pressure cooker and/or hot water canner
- Canning jars – don’t use peanut butter or mayonnaise jars – glass is too thin
- Always use new lids, can re-use bands if they aren’t rusted
- Kettle for boiling water
- Pots as needed for syrups, prepared foods
- Jar lifter
- Jar funnel that has a wide opening
- Clean dishtowels for wiping jar edges and holding hot jars
- There are many more tools and gadgets that you can buy. Depending on how much canning you will do, you may want to get them. One example: a wand that uses a magnet to lift jar lids from hot water.

Getting started on canning:
- It seems like there are a lot of things to do all at the same time. Start with simple recipes like a basic jam or tomato juice for your first effort.
- Look your produce over carefully. You want ripe, but not overripe. If there are any bruises or nicks, trim them off. Cut the produce into the size desired. Prepare the recipe.
- Sterilize your jars, lids and rings. Jars can be sterilized in the dishwasher. Time the dishwasher to finish when you want to start filling the jars. Lids and rings can be sterilized in a pan of boiling water.
- Place water in the canner, bring to a boil and hold it at a simmer.
- Fill the jars – you need a ½-inch head space for high acid foods, but it varies depending on what you are canning.
- Remove air bubbles – use a table knife or a special tool.
- Wipe the jar edge, make sure it is clean -- any food left on the edge can prevent sealing.
- Place a lid on the jar, put on the band and tighten just to the point of resistance. Don’t want it impossible to get off, nor very loose.
- Place jars in the simmering water as you fill them.
- May have to add water to a hot water canner.
- Timing depends on what you are canning, what method you are using.
• Remove jars from the canner, allow to cool naturally to room temperature. Don’t run cold water over them.
• If lid doesn’t seal with 12-24 hours, reprocess or use immediately. (I have only had this happen one time to one jar.)

**Fruit** – Jams and jellies are most common ways to preserve. One challenge is that most recipes call for more sugar than I’d prefer. Another option: cook LONG and SLOW.

In the heat of the summer I find it just too hot for that. Crock Pots are a great invention for low sugar preserving. Then you can freeze or can as you wish.

Syrups and molasses – (high sugar or long cooking) are excellent flavor additions for desserts, vinaigrettes.

Hot water canning is usually sufficient, but can use the pressure canning method for some items (not fresh peaches – it cooks them to death.)

I learned a tip recently that adds extra flavor for stone fruit jams like apricots, peaches and plums. Use a clean hammer to crack (not smash) the seeds, and throw them in the pot as the fruit is cooking. It adds a nice bitter almond complexity to the taste.