



Notes From the Pea Patch

Foxtail Community Farm

Week 15

September 7, 2010

Wife's Farmer's ^ Notebook

As a follow-up to last week's article on freezing, this week focuses on canning as a time-honored method for saving the harvest. While it may seem daunting, canning is easy and gratifying once you get the hang of it. We've highlighted some key concepts in this article; you should consult a reference book for more details. Happy canning!

Safety First

Food safety dictates virtually all steps in canning to prevent contamination and spoilage that could cause food poisoning, including botulism. Start with a large, clean work space. Select fresh produce, wash well and trim any blemishes. Follow your selected recipe carefully, and be cautious of any ingredient substitutions that could alter the overall pH.

The acidity of food dictates the canning method. High acid ($\text{pH} \leq 4.6$) foods can be safely canned in a boiling water bath. Low acid ($\text{pH} > 4.6$) foods **must** be processed in a steam pressure canner. Generally speaking, fruits are high acid, and vegetables are low acid. You can raise the acidity (lower the pH) of vegetables by adding vinegar. (*Note: This article focuses on boiling water canning of high acid foods.*)

Sterilize jars and caps (*see equipment, below*) in a boiling water bath. Fill hot jars as per your recipe, put on the caps and process in the boiling water bath for the required time (generally 10-40 minutes). Remove jars when done, and let cool on a rack or towel. Check to be sure that the lids have sealed; if not, you can re-process with a new lid, or put jar in fridge to use immediately. Properly processed and sealed jars can be stored safely out of the fridge for up to a year.

For some reason, reference books don't usually mention another big safety risk: heat. Canning is hot! Hot water, hot steam, hot products, hot jars! Use common sense and proper equipment to avoid being splashed or burned (as my high school chemistry teacher cautioned: hot glass looks exactly the same as cold glass!).

(continued on reverse)

This Week's Harvest

Edamame – Fresh Japanese soybeans in their pods. A specialty item grown at member request. Edamame resemble baby lima beans, with a fresh flavor somewhere between limas and green peas. Store in an open container in fridge for up to one week. For a spectacular snack, strip the pods off the stems and boil them whole in generously salted water for 5 minutes. Drain the pods, then slip the seeds out of the pods directly into your mouth. If you're patient, instead remove boiled seeds from pods and spread on a baking sheet, sprinkle with salt or other spices (garam masala is lovely) and roast at 400°F until lightly brown and crunchy.

Pattypan Squash – the last of our six (or was it seven?) varieties of summer squash this season. Some people love to stuff these with a mix of chopped squash, breadcrumbs and other goodies and bake. We'd appreciate your feedback on spacing out the different varieties of summer squash this season.

Sweet Onions – another crop troubled by the hot weather this year, manifested in reduced volume but hopefully not quality. These are Walla Walla, sweeter and juicier than other varieties of storage onions. Store in fridge or in a dark, dry area.

Also...

**Dill ~Carrots ~ Cucumbers
Green Snap Beans ~ Eggplant ~ Okra
Tomatoes ~ Sweet Peppers**

No fruit this week – a lull between summer and fall fruit crops.

Members with smaller size shares may not receive all items or quantities described

COMING ATTRACTIONS!

- ◆ Red Beets
- ◆ Hot Peppers
- ◆ Apples



Recipe of the Week: Summer's End Pickles

If you're inspired by our article, here's a nice way to pack a little bit of everything into a canning jar as we mark the unofficial end of summer. If you're not up for canning yet, you can make a few jars to pop right into the fridge – they should last a few weeks there.

The vegetables:

10 cups of any combination of mixed vegetables:

- Summer Squash
 - Green Beans
 - Carrots
 - Onions
 - Sweet Pepper
 - Cucumbers
 - Okra
- Cut into relatively uniform shapes/ sizes.
Try:
- Strips/spears
 - Sliced rounds
 - Cubes

The brine:

- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup white cane sugar
- 2 tbs dry mustard (optional)
- 2 tbs mustard seed
- 1 ½ tbs canning or kosher salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp ginger
- 3 cups cider vinegar

Combine all ingredients for brine in a pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

Pack raw vegetables into clean, sterilized glass pint jars (note: pack tightly as they will shrink with processing). Pour hot brine into each jar to cover vegetables, leaving ¼ inch headspace at top. Remove any large air bubbles with a plastic spatula or knife. Adjust 2-piece caps. Process 15 minutes in boiling water canning bath, or let cool and store in fridge.

Farmer's Notebook, *continued...*

Equipment

There are a few essential pieces of gear you will need for successful canning:

- ✓ A large covered pot, deep enough to hold 6+ jars and cover jars with at least 1-2 inches of water;
- ✓ A metal rack for the pot to hold jars upright and separated, to allow full water circulation;
- ✓ Jars and caps (see below);
- ✓ A wide mouth funnel for filling jars;
- ✓ A “jar lifter” - special wide tongs for moving jars into and out of the water bath;
- ✓ A grip to hold hot jars while caps are twisted on.

While you don't have to purchase specialized equipment (yes, you can use any super-big pot with a lid and make your own rack out of wire), a basic canning set that includes a pot (get the biggest one) and utensils is a modest and worthwhile investment.

Jars and two-piece caps can be purchased at most grocery or hardware stores. These caps include a flat metal lid and a screw-on metal band that holds the lid in place. It is the lid that vacuum seals to the jar during processing; the bands can then be removed. Bands can be re-used, but lids cannot. Be sure to get lids and bands that match the jar size you are using (i.e., wide mouth vs. regular). We purchase jars and nicer one-piece screw-on lids in large quantities from Burch Bottle & Packaging, a local company in Waterford (burchbottle.com).

What to Make

There's an endless variety of products to be canned, limited only by your harvest basket and imagination:

- Whole or sliced fruit preserves
- Fruit jams, jellies and spreads
- Tomatoes whole, diced or sauce
- Pickled cucumbers or other vegetables
- Chutneys, relishes, salsas or other specialty recipes

Most jams require added pectin, a natural substance in fruit that makes it gel when cooked. You can make your own from apples, or purchase commercial pectin. Both powdered and liquid forms are available, but the main difference in pectin products is the amount of sugar needed to gel, which can be as much as two cups of sugar per cup of fruit! Last year we switched to Pomona's pectin, a preservative-free citrus pectin that uses calcium rather than sugar to gel, allowing us to greatly reduce the amount of sweetener and/or use other sweeteners such as honey or maple syrup. You can buy it in individual use packages or in bulk packages (pomonapectin.com).



Member Corner

What's your favorite local restaurant that does a great job of using local foods?

- ◆ Antipasto's in Clifton Park
- ◆ The Garden Place in Londonderry, VT
- ◆ New World Bistro Bar in Albany
- ◆ Pegasus in Coxsackie
- ◆ Beekman Street Bistro in Saratoga Springs
- ◆ Ruby's in Freehold
- ◆ Jake Moon Restaurant & Cafe in Clarksville