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# FOR THE LARDER ENDLESS SUMMER

## Putting By the Season's Bounty

BY SHERRI BROOKS VINTON

Stop! That's what I want to yell about this time of year. Tomatoes, peaches, cucumbers, and green beans, fresh herbs, peppers (all kinds), zucchini, and berries: it's all here now, and—wow!—it tastes great. The food is so fresh and gorgeous I just want to freeze the moment. Luckily we can freeze—or can, dry, pickle, or preserve—our sensational seasonal surplus and be rewarded with delicious flavor all year round.

Techniques for food preservation, or “putting by,” date back to prehistoric times—think saber-tooth jerky. Until just a generation or two ago, canning seasonal foods was still common kitchen practice. It is only in the last few decades, as worldwide food distribution has clouded our sense of seasonal availability, that home cooks have curbed their canning habit.

However, as more eaters turn to local food sources, the craft of putting by is making a comeback. It's a natural extension of the sustainable food movement, with benefits for the eater, the farmer, and the land. Part of the pleasure of preserving is that it allows you to control the quality of your ingredients and avoid the additives and preservatives often found in commercially preserved foods. Home preserved foods, particularly if you are picking them from your own garden, can also save you money and, with fewer trips to the grocery store, save you time, too. Put by locally grown foods and you will be supporting area growers into the fourth season. And because you're saving local food you will also be saving the planet.

You don't need gobs of time to do this. A number of preservation methods are available to the home cook—some requiring nothing more than a piece of string and a few minutes of your time—so anyone can save something from this year's harvest. Here are a few tips and tricks you can use to stop time in its tracks:

### REFRIGERATOR PICKLES

Whip up a batch of these refrigerator pickles and you will take your fresh veggies—carrots, cucumbers, radishes, daikon, zucchini, cauliflower—to a whole new level. They are easy enough to cook up while you're making dinner. Just a quick dip in a hot brine and they will last in your refrigerator for 2–4 weeks. (see Recipe)

### COOK IT DOWN

A simple, space-saving idea is to cook down your surplus. Caramelize extra onions, quickly sauté an overabundance of greens, roast and peel peppers, then store in small containers and freeze for up to six months. You can toss them directly into simmering soups and stews or defrost and blend into frittatas and omelets, tuck into sandwiches, or toss with rice or pasta for a quick, flavorful side dish.



## SPICED-CARROT ICE BOX PICKLES

Courtesy of Sherri Brooks Vinton,  
www.sherribrooksvinton.com

*Because it relies on refrigeration rather than perfect processing to retard bacterial growth, this is a great recipe for first-time canners.*  
—Sherri Brooks Vinton

- 1½ cups water
- 1 cup white vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 4–6 cloves garlic, sliced
- 2 hot jalapeño peppers sliced, with seeds (make sure to check your peppers for heat—their potency varies widely)
- 1½ tablespoons salt
- 1 pound baby carrots (actual little, young carrots, not the bagged nubs in the grocery store) or large carrots cut into ½ inch sticks

Place all ingredients, except carrots, in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Add carrots and remove from heat. Allow to cool, then pack carrots in clean glass canning jars. Pour pickling liquid over top and chill, covered for at least two days and up to one month.

## FREEZING

Freezing is a fast, modern way to preserve the summer harvest. Many items benefit from a quick blanch before freezing, which deactivates some of the enzymes that can cause deterioration. Boil vegetables such as asparagus, green beans, broccoli, and peas for one to two minutes, then plunge them into a large bowl of ice and water to stop the cooking process. Dry thoroughly and freeze in bags or airtight containers for four to six months.

Berries, cherries, even tomatoes, can be frozen without blanching. Arrange on a cookie sheet in a single layer and freeze. When frozen, transfer to freezer bags, push out as much air as possible, seal, and return to freezer. (Skins will slip off frozen tomatoes easily as they begin to thaw or when briefly run under warm water.)

## DRYING AND DEHYDRATING

Dehydrated foods are light and take up little space, two points for easy storage. Herbs and hot peppers can be air-dried, just hang in a well-ventilated, dry room (attics are great) until brittle. Foods that contain a lot of water, such as apples, berries, and tomatoes, can also be air-dried but need the help of a fan, dehydrator, or low-heat drying in your oven to ensure steady air circulation and dependable results.

## ROOT CELLARING

Many fruits and vegetables, such as apples, roots and tubers, onions, garlic, and squashes will keep for months if stored properly. A cool place under the porch or in the garage, a closed-off section of the basement, even a corner of the refrigerator can serve as a place to squirrel away these goodies in the wintertime. Ask your grower for tips on long-term storage or check out the list of resources below for more information.

## CANNING

Home canning gives a lot of eaters the willies, but it needn't be intimidating or dangerous. The basic process—called the boiling water method—uses equipment you probably already have in your kitchen or can easily and affordably acquire at the local hardware store. As with baking, it's important to follow a recipe to get good results. Playing fast and loose with the ingredient list can make the difference between a year's worth of pantry supplies and a science experiment gone terribly wrong. This is also one instance where you do not want to use your grandmother's recipe, since practices and formulas have been updated in recent decades to guarantee flavor and quality.

Here are a few reliable resources with great tasting recipes. The techniques range from quick and easy time-savers to more complex projects, so there's something here for everyone who wants to enjoy an endless summer. 🍷

*Preserving Summer's Bounty*, edited by Susan McClure, Rodale Press, 1998

*Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving*, edited by Judi Kingry and Lauren Devine, Robert Rose, 2006

*Putting Food By*, Janet Greene, Plume, 1992